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BRITISH ADMINISTRATION IN ASSAM

(1825-1845)

with Special Reference to the Hill-Tribes on the Frontier.

A T H E S I S

submitted to the University of London for

the Degree of Ph.D. (History)

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by

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(Abstract)

Since the acceptance of the Dewani in Bengal, 1765, the policy pursued by the British Government towards the native states on the North-East frontier of India had been mainly pacific and defensive. The aggression of the Burmese and the consequent insecurity of the Eastern frontier, however, drove them to take up arms against Ava and the termination of the first Anglo-Burmese war brought British power and Assam in close contact. With the capitulation of Rangpur, on 31 Jan. 1825, the whole of the Brahmaputra valley fell into their hands. The strong arguments of David Scott, Agent to the Governor General on the North-East frontier, influenced the Supreme Court to annex Lower Assam; the fate of Eastern Assam, then under military occupation was left undecided. Considering an abrupt change harmful to the body politic, Scott laid the foundation of British rule in Assam, on the ruins of the earlier régime.

The war with Ava completely altered the social and economic structure in Assam. Scott's adherence to a system which was then an anachronism resulted in administrative confusion. The government of the less profitable portion of Eastern Assam was in consequence entrusted to a native prince, in the person of Raja Purandar Singha. Reform was the crying need of the hour

and in Lower Assam, there had been radical changes in the whole administration. Unfortunately, the Raja could effect little, as such reforms must be at the expense of the former aristocracy who were mainly instrumental in raising him to the throne. The experiment of native monarchy therefore failed and the whole of Assam passed under the control of the British Government.

Equally profound was the effect of these changes on the fortunes of the numerous hill-tribes, on the frontier of the province. The loss of life and the migrations which were the aftermath of the war, deprived many of the customary rights which had been conceded to them by the former government. Necessity therefore compelled them to descend to the plains and even to commit acts of aggression. The new rulers more powerful, and naturally less tolerant, resorted to measures of retaliation, but their ignorance of the nature of the hillmen and of the country inhabited by them failed to produce the desired effect. A few years' experience showed that even these rude mountaineers were amenable to reason, that conciliation was a better preventive than half-hearted coercion and that each tribe was to be treated according to its peculiar needs and requirements.

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These maps are based on the original maps of Assam found at the Records Department, Commonwealth Relations Office, London.

ABBREVIATIONS.

- B.G. - Government of Bengal.
C.D. - Despatches to India and Bengal.
B.E.R. - Bengal Education Reports.
B.P.C. - Bengal Political Consultations.
B.J.C. - Bengal Judicial Consultations.
B.R.C. - Bengal Revenue Consultations.
I.P.C. - India Political Consultations.
J.L.B. - Judicial Letters from Bengal.
R.L.B. - Revenue Letters from Bengal.
B.S.P.C. - Bengal Secret and Political Consultations.
P.L.I.B. - Political Letters from India and Bengal.
J.A.S.B. - Journal of the Asiatic Society, Bengal.
J.R.A.S. - Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.

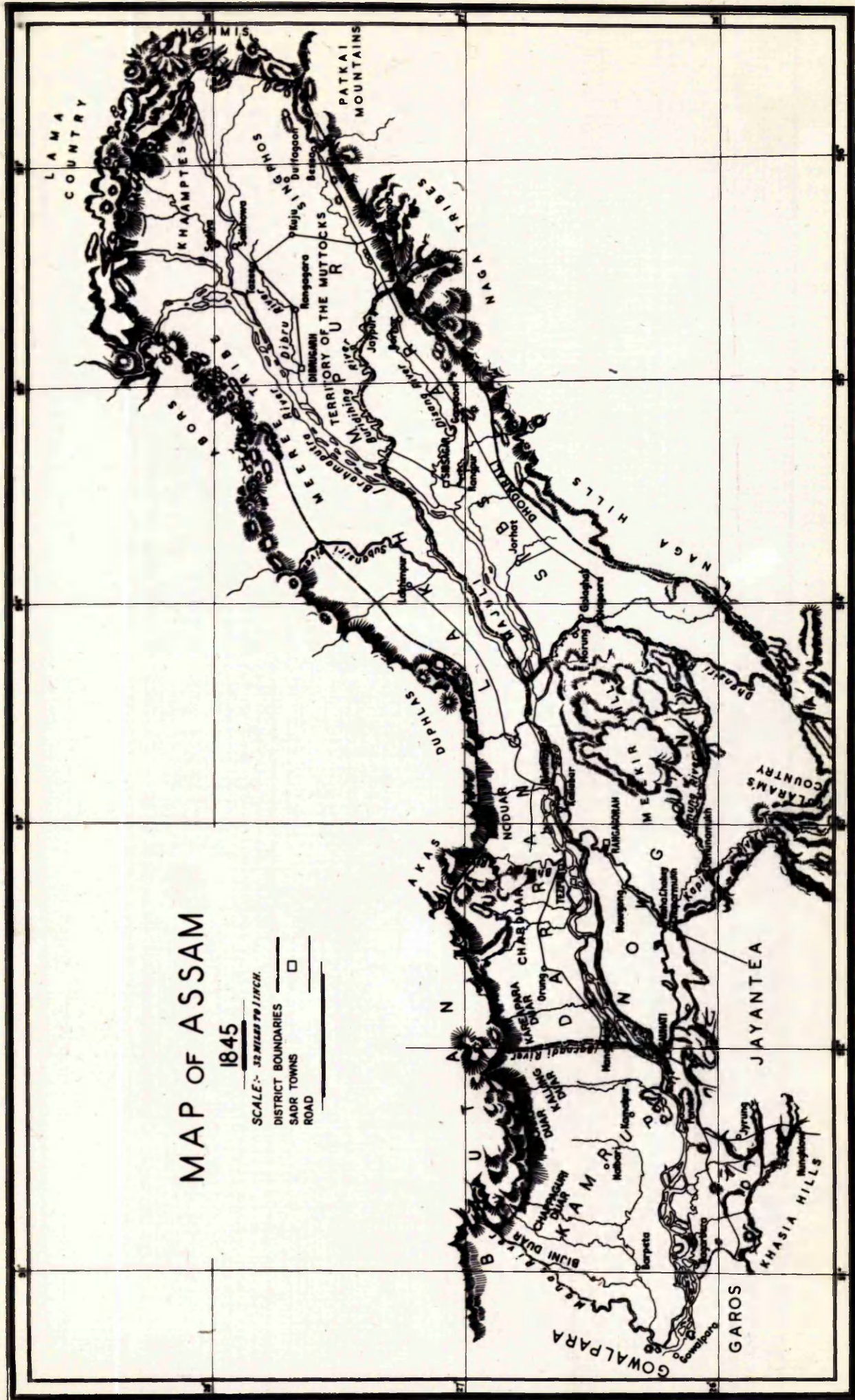
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MAP OF ASSAM

1845

SCALE:- 32 MILES TO 1 INCH.

DISTRICT BOUNDARIES ———
 SADR TOWNS □
 ROAD ———



I N T R O D U C T I O N .

I. The Physical Background.

'The Cinderella of the Empire', **ASSAM** lies at the north east corner of India. It is situated between the twenty-third and twenty-eighth degrees of latitude and between the ninetieth and ninety-sixth degrees of eastern longitude, and comprises the two valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Surma rivers together with central hill tracts, an area of 61,856⁽¹⁾ square miles.

The valley of the Brahmaputra or Assam proper, with which we are mainly concerned, is a long alluvial plain stretching for about 450 miles and of a breadth varying from 20 to 60 miles; it extends from the river Manas, opposite to Gowalpara to the foot of the Himalayas, close upon the western boundary of China. On the north it is bounded by the hills occupied by the Sub-Himalyan tribes - the Bhuteahs, Akas, Duflas, Abors, Meerees; on the north-east the Mishmi Hills which sweep round the head of the Brahmaputra valley; The Khamtis and Singphos separate Assam from China and Burma. On the south-east lie the States of Cachar and Manipur. To the South again the

(1) This area is exclusive of the district of Sylhet, which had recently been transferred to East Bengal, since the partition of India.

elevated plateau, known as the Assam Range, inhabited by the Nagas, Jayanteas,⁽¹⁾ Khasias and Garos westward in succession.

The uniform level of the valley is intercepted by a few low conical hills, studded in isolated mounds or in clusters over the plateau; but its width is narrowed at the principal points by offshoots of the hills that form the southern fringe - the Mikir Hills in the middle, and lower down at Gauhati and Gowaipara, there are spurs jutting out almost to the bank of the Brahmaputra.

Lakes of a larger dimension are not to be seen in Assam, but the whole valley is dotted with a number of hollows, beels and swamps. The Brahmaputra runs throughout from east to west, with a number of affluents, great and small from the hills north and south. Of the tributaries the northern are snow-fed, while those from the south depend on summer showers for their volume; but almost all overflow their banks during the rains and flow over sandy beds causing not infrequent changes in their courses, thus necessitating the erection of embankments, the 'Mathawaris', for the protection of the neighbouring villages.

The landscape of the Brahmaputra/affords a relief to the dreary plains so monotonous in other parts of India.

"In the foreground are to be seen fields of waving rice, of vivid green during the summer season but changing to rich gold as the harvest time draws near. Round the edges of the rice Pathars (fields) are groves of slender palms, broad-leaved plantains and feathery bamboos, which conceal the cottages of the cultivators, while further back is often to be seen the dark green

(1) In the case of 'Khasia' and Jayantea' I have followed Assamese spelling.

line of primeval forest. The view is bounded to the north (south and east) by the bluest of blue hills, whose sides are for the most part clothed with trees, though here and there are patches of white rock, where the cliff is too precipitous to afford a lodging for a plant or sapling At all seasons of the year the country looks fresh, and cool, and green. The trees in the forest never lose their leaves, while the roads are often carpeted with grass and bordered with ferns that recalls the lanes of Devonshire." (1)

While nature may have lavished all her beauties on Assam, she has kept her isolated. Girded on three sides by a chain of mountains she had access only to peoples less civilized than her own. And though the Brahmaputra is the great highway of communications, before the age of steam, navigation on the river was at the mercy of the prevailing winds. (2) A voyage in the dry season was extremely tedious. Against the furious current in the rains it was uncertain and perilous. Therefore, formerly, strangers

(1) Allen, B.C; District Gazetteer of Lakhimpur, pp.3-4.

(2) The following is a striking instance given by Capt. Wilcox: "Immediately below Gohati, hills confine the Brahmaputra to the breadth of one thousand two hundred yards, the narrowest in its course through Assam; there in the rainy season boats are necessitated to be moored till a westerly breeze springs up of force sufficient to carry them through the narrow strait; but there is often great difficulty, even when the river flows in an open bed. When coming down the river in the latter end of 1825 I saw a fleet of commissariat boats (at the time very much required with their supplies for the army) which had been twenty-five days between Goalpara and Nughurbera hills, a distance of thirty miles, and there was no remarkable wind to impede their progress." Wilcox, Memoir of a Survey of Assam, etc. 1825-28. Asiatic Research, vol. xvii, 1832. See footnote, p. 464.

were seldom found in Assam, while few of her people crossed the boundary. Geography imposed formidable barriers on her intercourse with the outside world and it is not surprising that the province remained in a state of stagnation until recent times.

Added to this, an inhospitable climate made the stranger's life miserable. Extreme humidity and a heavy rainfall are the peculiarities of the climate. During the rains the humidity is so great that it makes life trying to Europeans and Indians alike. (1) A soil covered with jungles and swamps in a sub-tropical climate is a dumping-ground for malarial germs, that have usually taken a heavy toll of human life. While Kalaazar, cholera and small-pox were once endemic. The rigours of the climate no less than the (2) sinews of her men have not infrequently driven the invader from Assam.

(1) Even to the natives of Upper India, the climate was so inimical that their employment in Assam was avoided as far as practicable leaving the defence of the province mainly to the local troops viz: the Sebundies, Doaneas etc. Casualties among the few Europeans were also not infrequent. Hardly a year passed, during our period, without the absence of some officers - civil or military - always on sick leave which considerably affected the performance of routine duties.

(2) Thus, incessant rain and the outbreak of pestilence were the most important causes of the ultimate failure of Mirjamla's invasion in Assam. "In the Mughal camp fever and flux carried off hundreds daily. Medicine had no effect and the dead could not be given a decent burial on account of their vast number. Dilir Khan's Corps was reduced from 1500 troops to about 450. The whole of Assam was infected, and two hundred and thirty thousand of its people died of disease that year." See Sarkar, J.N. History of Aurangzib, vol. III. pp. 186-7, 194.

The climate is so enervating that the saying goes: "When a dog chases a rabbit, they both walk." Fortunately, the people are blessed with a soil extremely fertile, where everything can be raised without much labour. Naturally therefore, compared with peoples who have to toil hard for a living, the Assamese may be less enterprising; but they are self-sufficient in a country which

"enjoys all the qualities requisite for rendering it one of the finest in the worldits numerous crystal streams abound in gold dust, and masses of solid metal; its mountains are pregnant with precious stones, its atmosphere is perfumed with tea growing wild and luxuriantly; and its soil so well adapted to all kinds of agricultural purpose, that it might be converted into one continued garden of silk and cotton, and coffee, and sugar, and tea over an extent of many hundred miles." (1)

(1) M'Cosh, Topography, p. 133.

II. The Political Background.

Prior to the advent of the British, this picturesque valley was, under the rule of Ahoms, an offshoot of the 'Tai' or Shan stock of South East Asia. In the early decades of the thirteenth century, penetrating into the South-east corner of the province they set up a principality of their own and in the course of the next three centuries these 'proud conquerors' not only established their suzerainty over all the original inhabitants but extended and consolidated their possessions as far as the river Manas. Abortive attempts were made by the rulers of Delhi to bring Assam under their subjection; even the invasion of Mirjumla, the valiant Mughal general who advanced as far as citadel of the Ahoms in 1660-62, resulted in nothing more than the temporary occupation of a portion of Western Assam.

The Fall of the Ahoms - The Ahom kingdom was founded by Sukapha (1228-68), consolidated under Godadhar Singha and reached its zenith under Rudra Singha (1696-1714). It was built up by force and it had to be maintained by force. The presence of a strong hand was always needed. Unfortunately from the middle of the 18th century, the throne was occupied by a number of weak and unscrupulous monarchs whose only ambition was the preservation of their own lives and power regardless of the needs of the country. Inevitably while the Court became the hotbed of intrigues and conspiracies accompanied by political assassinations, outlying parts fell off in rapid successions.

Of the causes that contributed to the fall of the Ahoms (1) the rebellion of the Moamarias - a socio-religious sect - was perhaps the most important. In 1769, the struggle began as a protest against their persecution by the Ahom rulers. In 1788 it came to a climax when the rebels overwhelmed the royalists and even occupied the seat of the Government. Gaurinath Singha, the reigning monarch fled to Gauhati, the Government collapsed and the Moamaries infested the country burning villages, looting property and destroying crops. (2)

Captain Welsh in Assam - Gaurinath implored the assistance of the British Government. The authorities at Fort William and even in England had in the meantime become interested in the commercial possibilities of Assam, but in general their policy was one of strict neutrality. The importunities of Gaurinath nevertheless moved Lord Cornwallis, "from motives of humanity as well as from a wish to be better informed of the interior state in Assam, its commerce ..." to despatch a detachment under Captain Welsh in 1792. Towards the end of the same year, British troops routed the rebels, reoccupied the capital and reinstated Gaurinath on the throne. Hardly had Welsh taken certain measures

(1) Consisting "mainly of persons of low social rank, such as Doms, Morans, Kacharis, Haris and Chitias, and as they denied the supremacy of the Brahmins they had naturally the special aversion of the orthodox Hindu hierarchy." Gait, History of Assam, p. 58.

(2) Bhuyan, S.K. Tungkhungia Buranji, pp. 116 & 119.

of security and reorganization, when unfortunately for Assam, there was a change in British Indian Government. Sir John Shore, who succeeded Cornwallis, reverted to the policy of non-intervention. In consequence Welsh was recalled. In July 1794, British troops were withdrawn from Assam and the Province was allowed to relapse to her former anarchy and civil war.

Sack of Assam by the Burmese - During the reigns of Kamaleswar (1794-1810) and Chandrakanta Singha (1811-18), the immediate successors of Gaurinath, there was a split in the Government - the royalists and the Premier, Purnanda Buragohain, the de facto ruler for the period 1783 to 1817. The efficient management of the Buragohain gave a breathing space to the distracted country, but his domineering nature created a host of enemies. The party in opposition, not excluding Raja Chandrakanta, being unable to oust his Premier from power, had not the least hesitation in appealing for foreign aid and succeeded in persuading the king of Ava to send a force to Assam. Towards the close of 1817, the Burmese entered Assam, crushed all opposition, installed the royalists in full power and in return carried off a huge indemnity and an Ahom princess, as a present to the Burmese monarch. In the tumult, the Buragohain committed suicide; but at the earliest opportunity, his adherents seized power. Chandrakanta was deposed and mutilated. In his place Purandar Singha, a scion of the royal family, was raised to the throne. When this new turn of affairs was reported at Amarapura,

the Burmese reappeared in 1819. Purandar fled to the Company's territory. Chandrakanta was reinstated by the Burmese who now determined to rule Assam. Chandrakanta soon found them to be 'dangerous allies'. Helpless and in disgust, he too fled to Bengal.

The ruin of Assam which had been thus repeatedly the scene of insurrections, civil war and invasions - was now complete. She was at the mercy of the Burmese, under whom plunder, devastation, murder and desecration were the order of the day. The dreadful cruelties perpetrated by the savage invaders can be imagined rather than described.⁽¹⁾ It is impossible to estimate the number of persons who fled, were killed or were deported to Burma. Suffice it to say, that in utter despair and agony men of substance abandoned the country, while thousands left their hearths and homes and even their children and lived in the

(1) Butler says "All who were suspected of being inimical to the reign of terror, were seized and bound by Burmese executioners, who cut off the lobes of the poor victims' ears and choice portions of the body, such as the points of the shoulders, and actually ate the raw flesh before the living sufferers. They then inhumanly inflicted, with a sword, deep but not mortal gashes on the body, that the mutilated might die slowly, and finally closed the tragedy disembowelling the wretched victims. Other diabolical acts of cruelty, practised by these monsters of humanity, have been detailed to me by persons now living with a minuteness which leaves no doubt of the authenticity of the facts; but they are so shocking that I cannot describe them." Travels and Adventures in Assam, pp. 248-49.

jungles on roots and plants.

As a result, in the wandseof M'cosh who surveyed the scene a few years later:

"This extensive valley, though some centuries ago richly cultivated by an industrious and enterprising people, is now throughout six-eighths or seven-eighths of its extent covered with a jungle of gigantic reeds, traversed only by the wild elephant or the buffalo, where a human footstep is unknown, and the atmosphere even to the natives themselves is pregnant with febrile miasmata and death." (1)

Burmese in Manipur - Apparently, Burmese intervention in the affairs of Assam was occasioned by the political bankruptcy of the Ahom government, but the real cause lay in the ambition of the Court of Ava to extend its power as far as the Brahmaputra. Actually, the programme began with the reign of A-Laung-Pa-ya (1752-60), when a portion of Manipur was annexed to Burma. From this time onwards in the words of Pemberton (2) "Manipur was doomed to devastating visitations of Burmese armies which have nine or ten times swept the country from one extremity to the other." In the scramble for power which broke out in 1812 amongst the Manipur brothers - Chaurjit, Marjit and Gambhir Singh, the Burmese intervened and set up Marjit as the ruler under the suzerainty of the king of Ava. The remaining brothers fell upon Cachar and drove its ruler Gobinda Chandra to seek protection under the British Government. Soon Marjit got tired of Burmese

(1) Topography, p. 13.

(2) Pemberton; Eastern frontier of British India, p. 36.

tutelage and was forced in 1819, to flee to Cachar. "From this period to 1823 Cachar was the arena, on which the several Muneepooree brothers, Choorjeet, Marjeet and Gambheer Sing contended for supremacy and as might have been anticipated, the inevitable result of their disputes was the most serious injury to the country, from the cession of the agricultural pursuits and the flight of a very considerable portion of the inhabitants to the adjacents districts of Sylhet, Jynteeah and Tiparah."⁽¹⁾

Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) - Notwithstanding repeated appeals for aid by the exiled princes - Purandar, Chandrakanta and Gobinda Chandra - until 1823, the British attitude towards the affairs of these native rulers was that of a silent observer. The Burmese aggression however, and the consequent insecurity of the Eastern frontier as a whole, compelled them to abandon their former policy and resort to arms against Ava. A defensive alliance had to be made immediately with the Ex-Raja of Cachar, Jayantea and Gambhir Sing, the most able and enterprising of the Manipuri brothers. The war began towards the close of February, 1824 with the march of British troops under Brigadier Macmoraine. Gauhati, Raha and Nowgong fell in rapid succession and the Assamese hailed with joy the advance of the British forces. After a temporary suspension of hostilities during the rains, operations were renewed by Colonel Richards. The Burmese beat a hasty retreat towards Upper Assam; lack of reinforcements,

(1) Ibid. p. 188.

the hostility of the Assamese and above all disunity in their own camp so much enfeebled their resistance that they were compelled to capitulate at Rangpur, on 31 January, 1825.

These achievements were however partially neutralized by the failure of the British troops to advance towards Manipur. Incessant rains and the jungles of Cachar were the cause of this. Ultimately, it was Gambhir Sing who with a band of followers penetrated into Manipur and cleared the whole country of the enemy as far as the Kabaw valley.

Towards the close of 1825 the invaders were expelled. The Burmese menace was then over. The security of the North-East frontier was also ensured. The skill, energy and perseverance exhibited by Gambhir Sing won for him the rule of Manipur. Not only was he vested with the status of an independent ruler, but he was also allowed to maintain an army of 3,000 equipped and disciplined under two European officers Capt. Grant and Lieut. Gordon; for Manipur was viewed to be the formidable bulwark against the Burmese aggressions on that frontier. (1) Raja Gobinda Chandra

(1) Ibid. pp. 47-48; B.S.P.C. 9 Apr. 1824, Nos. 7-8.

"The establishment of an independent government in Manipur" observed Scott, "in alliance with us would undoubtedly prove the most powerful and effectual check upon the Burmese government, that could well be devised by affording us at all times a ready passage into the heart of their dominions and as an ally a military power that could upon occasion prove really useful to us."

was also restored as a tributary chief to his possessions in Cachar. The future of Assam had yet to be decided; the administration of this new acquisition forms the subject of our subsequent chapters.

III. The Economic Background.

The 'Khelwari' System - Under the Ahom government, the whole male population of Assam was divided into 'khels' or clans according to their occupation, and the latter again subdivided into 'Gotes' consisting at first of four and later three 'pykes' or individuals - 'Mul' (1st), 'Dewal' (2nd), and 'Tewal' (3rd). Every pyke was bound to serve the king for his private or public service, for one third of the year or to supply a certain quantity of his produce. He was entitled in return to have two 'puras' (1) of 'Rupit' land termed 'Gamati' or Bodyland. During the period of his service Dewal and Tewal remained at home to cultivate their land and to provide the requirements of the pyke on duty.

(1) One pura is equal to $3 \frac{2}{3}$ Bengal Beegha or 5877 sq. yds.
Rupit is the best cultivable land producing a kind of paddy known as Sali Dhan.

They relieved each other in turn at regular intervals so as to ensure that one of them was always in attendance. (1) The pykes were under the command of higher officers, not unlike the Mughal 'mansabdars', Phukens, Rajkhowas, under whom were petty officers Hazarikas, Saikas, and Boras. (2)

The revenue was realised therefore mainly in personal service and articles of produce and about one third also in cash, which was derived from the following sources:-

(1) A pyke failing to attend in his assigned duty or to supply the required quota of produce was required to pay an equivalent tax of Rs. 3/- per head. (2) Some khels, usually non-cultivators were taxed on account of their particular profession, viz. the gold washers and the braziers had to pay a tax of Rs. 5/-, oil pressers Rs. 3/-, fishermen Rs. 2/- and so on. (3) Lands in excess of the requirement of the pykes - the 'Opar' or 'Katani' land - were rented out to the pykes at the low rate of 8 as a pura. (4) It was expected that all state officials should pay a handsome offering to their Royal Master on ceremonial occasions particularly at the hour of appointment, while numerous vassal chiefs of the Ahom Raj contributed a large amount to their Suzerain. Finally (5) the farming of the hats, markets and fisheries constituted one of the important sources of revenue in cash.

The pyke lands were the property of the Government - neither heritable, nor transferable by sale or bequest. On the demise or desertion of a pyke, theoretically it would escheat

(1) For further details of the Khel system see Hamilton, F., An Account of Assam, pp. 23-4; Barua Gunaviram, Assam Buranji, pp. 271-75; Gohain, U., Assam under the Ahoms, pp. 114-19; Bhuyan, S.K.; Ahomar Din pp. 114-19; Jenkins, Revenue Administration in Assam, 1853; Revenue and Judicial Administration, Assam, 1835.

(2) Theoretically Phukens were the commanders of 6,000, Rajkhowas 3,000, Hazarikas 1,000, Saikias 100 and Boras of 20; but in practice exact numbers are hardly ever found under each commander. See Ward, J.P. History of Assam pp. v-xxxv.

to the Raja to be disposed of at his pleasure. Usually, however, such lands descended to the heir and continued to be in his possession so long as he adhered to the conditions of a pyke.

The State officials were generally remunerated with a number of pykes - the 'Lixos'. They were also allowed to a limited extent rent free lands known as 'Nankars' and 'Manmati'; the former hereditary, the latter during the period of office only and not transferable. But these officers could occupy without any rent vast tracts of waste lands, the 'Khals', where they usually employed their Lixos, slaves and runaway pykes.

From early times certain lands were granted rent-free (Lakhiraj) in the form of Brahmottar, Debottar and Dharmottar for the services in the Temples, the 'Satras' and for the support of the persons attached thereto.⁽¹⁾

The failure of the Khel System - It will be obvious from the above that the king required little money to pay his civil and military officers, to gratify the needs of the favourites, to defray the expenses of the religious and public institutions and works of public utility - all were remunerated in land or labour. Thus, when the State demand in cash was very limited, the requirements of the royal household and the officers being regularly supplied by different guilds for the purpose, those

(1) Similar to the monasteries in Europe, in the Middle Ages, the 'Satras' in Assam were religious and charitable institutions, presided over by the spiritual head, known as Gosain to whom also were attached a number of pykes called Bhakats.

of the people by their own labour or at most by barter, the Khel system worked and worked satisfactorily. But the protracted conflict with the Mughals and the fighting with the turbulent border tribes, civil wars and insurrections, famine and pestilence altered the whole economic structure. To begin with the presents and heavy tribute exacted by Mirjumla (1665)⁽¹⁾, the plunder of Rangpur by insurgents (1787-93)⁽²⁾, the subsidies to the Company's detachments (1794) and the seizure of what remained in reserve at Rangpur by Captain Welsh in June 1794⁽³⁾, exerted so much financial strain on the Government, that in 1795 an unusual expedient of levying a tax, the 'Barangani', on the Satras had to be resorted to by Premier Purnanda Buragohain to meet an emergent payment of British troops in Assam.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Mahanta, Sukumar; Assam Buranji, pp. 105-6.

(2) Bhuyan, S.K. Asamar Padya Buranji, p. 112.

(3) Indigenous sources are unanimous that the Captain carried away on his boats 40,000 pieces of golden ornaments, an equal number of silver ornaments, 200,000,000 golden mohurs besides other articles of great value. These astronomical figures may not be an approximation to the actual truth; yet by way of remuneration Welsh must have seized and carried away what was in the Treasury on the even of departure from Assam; Bhuyan, S.K. Tungkhungia Buranji para 244; Asamar Padya Buranji pp. 112-13.

(4) About the same time, to make another heavy payment, the viceroy of Gauhati had also resorted to a similar measure: Tungkhungia Buranji, pp. 243 and 263.

Apart from this increased demand in money, there was also a complete breakdown in the organisation itself. For the successful working of the Khel system all the members of a particular guild should reside as closely as possible; in fact, formerly Khels were located in a given tract of territory with definite boundaries. This became gradually impracticable. Supposing the original number in the clan of Sonwal (gold washers) was 50, their children becoming Sonwals in due course like their fathers, the surplus pykes had to be provided elsewhere and were consequently distributed throughout the country. In this state of affairs, the unparalleled deaths and desertions in the wake of the Burmese invasions inevitably led to such a mixing of pykes, that on the eve of the British occupation the Khels became misnomers and their organisation was one of confusion worse confounded.

Policy towards the Hill Tribes - The Ahom rulers maintained their suzerainty even over the neighbouring hill chiefs. But they were too conscious of their limitations to attempt to bring the extensive frontier under their direct supervision. As the subjugation of the turbulent highlanders was out of the question, it was considered expedient to conciliate their chieftains by frequent contacts and exchange of presents or by grants of certain rights at the foot of their respective hills.

In return for an annual tribute of yak tails, ponies, musk, gold dust and blankets the government of Bhutan was allowed

(1)
 exclusive control over the duars north of Kamrup and limited
 (2)
 jurisdiction over those of Darrang. To their eastern neighbours the Akas and the Duflas, it was permitted in return for forbearance from raiding to levy 'Posa' or blackmail over certain khels known as the 'Bohoteeas'. Likewise the Abors had certain rights over the Meerees and the Meerees over those of the Assamese inhabiting the north of the district of Lakhimpur. The Nagas in the south were required to pay annual homage to the Ahom monarch with presents of ivory, spears, salt, cotton and slaves in return for the rights they obtained over the khats, fisheries and salt wells in the hills.
 (3)

The terms and conditions thus varied with each tribe. They were determined by the exigencies of the situation or by the strength and weakness of the parties concerned, and were rather an acknowledgement of the sovereign authority than a serious attempt to raise a substantial revenue.

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- (1) These 'Dooars' or 'Duars' were narrow strips of land varying from 10 to 20 miles, which ran along the base of the northern hills and stretching from the river Teesta to the frontier of Upper Assam. On the border of Bhutan there were eighteen passes into the duars from the hills and each was under the authority of an officer called 'Jungpen' (Governor) or 'Soubha'. Under the administration of each Jungpen was a certain division of territory which bears the name of the pass to which it was attached.
- (2) The peculiarity of the Darrang duars is that they came under the jurisdiction of Assam^{Govt} from 15 June to 15 October (Asar to Aswin).
- (3) For details see Hamilton, F.; An Account of Assam, pp 67-74; Mackenzie, A; North East Frontier of Bengal, pp. 10, 21-22, 27, 34; Gohain, U.; Assam under the Ahoms, Chap. III.

CHAPTER ONE.

THE BEGINNINGS OF BRITISH RULE (1825-38)

1. The Non-Regulated Province.

Ever since the acceptance of the Diwani in Bengal, by Robert Clive, in 1765, the territorial possessions of the East India Company had been regulated by a series of instructions, issued by the Court of Directors from England. In 1793, the Governor-General in Council was vested with the power of enacting laws, subject of course, to the approval of The King in Council, and Lord Cornwallis promulgated a series of forty-eight Regulations, commonly known as Bengal Regulations. They provided a code of laws for the administration of the areas under the Presidency of Fort William. This was soon followed by similar codes, for the Provinces of Madras and Bombay. Thus, the affairs of the older territories of the Company had been conducted under regularly enacted laws; the rights of the Government being in this way clearly defined, it could hardly exercise any power beyond the prescribed limits.

With the gradual expansion of the Company's possessions, there appeared, however, a perceptible change towards the newly conquered territories. The formal acknowledgement of this policy is seen in the Regulation X of 1822.⁽¹⁾ It begins with a preamble that "there exist in different parts of the territories subject to

(1) Kaye; Administration of the East India Company, p. 438.

the Presidency of Fort William, races of people entirely distinct from the ordinary population and to whose circumstances therefore the system of Government established by the general Regulations is wholly inapplicable." The attention of the Governor-General in Council had been drawn, for some time^s part, to the conditions of the "rude tribes" on the North East Frontier, and if they were to be brought to civilised life, a special plan adaptable to their peculiar customs and prejudices, was considered absolutely necessary. Article II of the Regulations separates the tract of territory comprising the Thanas of Gawalpara, Dhubri, Karaibari from the jurisdiction of the district of Rangpur, while Article III entrusts the administration of civil and criminal justice, the collection of revenue and Superintendence of Police and every other branch of Government of these areas to an officer appointed by the Governor-General in Council, with the title of Civil Commissioner for the North East part of Rangpur "to conduct the same, by the principles and spirit of the existing Regulations, subject to the restrictions and modifications hereafter provided and to such other alterations and amendments as may from time to time be ordered by the Governor-General in Council."⁽¹⁾

Thus, on the North East Frontier of India a beginning

(1) Clark, R: Bengal Regulations, pp. 659-63.

(1) was made with what was known as the non-regulated system. These territories "do not bow down to the letters of the Regulations, but are governed after a ruder and simpler fashion, by an executive composed partly of civilians and partly of soldiers, upon a mixed system into which the spirit of the Regulations is infused in such a manner as to cause it to harmonise and blend itself with all that is good in the spirit of native institutions and to be respected in the local usage of the country." (2) Here the executive is entirely independent of the legislature and the powers of a collector, magistrate and judge are concentrated in the same hands, subject, however, to the supervision of a superior authority. With an intensely centralised and all powerful executive, (3) approaching a personal despotism, the system characterised by a simple and more direct procedure, was undoubtedly well intentioned and had the wholesome effect of bringing the

(1) The non-regulated areas under the Presidency of Bengal; - Assam, Arakan, Tenasserim Provinces, Sauger and Nurbada Territories, the districts on the south west frontier, the cis-sutlej States including Ambala, Ludhiana, Sambalpur, the whole of the Punjab and some States held by the Sikh chiefs. Under the Government of the North West Provinces; Dehra Dun, Kumaon, Garhwal, Ajmere, etc. Under Madras Government; Ganjam, Vizagapatam and Kurnal and under the Government of Bombay; Kolaba, Sindh and Satara.

(2) Kaye, p. 435.

(3) "If we find a people groaning under depotism, we must be despotic ourselves. A little tyranny is absolutely necessary at such times, to the welfare of the people and it is not to be doubted that on the whole a military government is best suited to such a state of society" - Kaye, p. 435.

authorities well within the reach of the people. Evidently, the success of the new scheme depended on the extent of personal contacts, the continuity of policies and mainly on the character, vision and promptitude of the man, on whom devolved the task of uplift.

David Scott, the Political Agent to the Governor-General on the North-East frontier - To hold these additional responsibilities on the North East frontier there could hardly have been a better choice than David Scott. Beginning his official career in 1807 as the Registrar of Gorukhpur, Scott had served six years after as the Judge and Magistrate of Purnea. In September 1816, in his exchange of appointment with Mr. Norman Maclead, the Commissioner of Cooch Behar, Scott became the Commissioner of Cooch Behar and Joint Magistrate of Rangput. In this capacity he also functioned as the channel of communication, on behalf of the British Government, for all business of a political nature with Assam, Bhutan and other independent states and chieftains on the North East frontier of Bengal. The negotiations, in which Scott was subsequently employed with some of these states and the intimate knowledge which he in consequence acquired of them, peculiarly qualified him for the

(1).
the new office.

Accordingly, in September 1822, in addition to his former duties, Scott was appointed Civil Commissioner in North East Rangpur with a salary of Rs. 40,000 per annum. (2) Unfortunately he took office at a time of growing insecurity on the North East Frontier. The Burmese were then assuming a threatening attitude to the British Government and were in fact, on the point of crossing the Frontier. It was Scott who pointed out to the Government the vulnerability of the whole of the Eastern Frontier suggesting that the policy of non-intervention, which had been so long the watchword towards Assam, should be discarded; that it was expedient to support and encourage the Assamese and other frontier tribes to resist or shake off the Burmese yoke. (3)

(1) Personal Records Vol. 19, pp. 27-61.

In nominating Scott the Government observed "The zeal and intelligence displayed by Mr. Scott in the execution of the measure which we have from time to time deemed it advisable to adopt for the protection of the Rangpore frontier and for the gradual civilization of the Garrow mountaineers naturally rendered us desirous of availing ourselves of the talents and local experience of that valuable officer in carrying into effect the more defined and extensive arrangement now in contemplation."

(2) B.P.C. 15 Feb. 1821, No. 23. See Personal Records, vol. 19, p. 45.

(3) B.S.P.C. 14 Nov. 1828, No. 8.

At this emergency, Scott's jurisdiction was further enlarged. On November 14, 1823, he was made the Political Agent to the Governor-General on the North East Frontier of Bengal and Civil Commissioner in Rangpur, to exercise in the former capacity "a general authority and superintendence" over political relations and intercourse with Cooch Behar, Bijni, Assam, Cachar, Manipur, Jayantea and other independent states - the sphere of his political jurisdiction extending to the Southern extremity of Tipperah - while as Civil Commissioner, he was to continue to perform the duties already assigned to him in Cooch Behar and Rangpur.⁽¹⁾

Joint Commissioners in Assam - Scott directed the campaigns in the war which broke out soon after. While the British troops under the command of Brigadier Macmoraine and afterwards Colonel Richards, made rapid strides in their advance towards Upper Assam, he continued the political transactions with the Assamese and such other native chiefs as were friendly to the British interests.⁽²⁾ In less than a year, as we have already seen, the Burmese were almost completely driven out of Assam. With the capitulation of Rangpur, 31 January, 1825, the whole of the Brahmaputra valley fell into the hands of the British, until final decisions should be made for its disposal,

(1) Ibid.

(2) B.S.P.C. 2 July, 1824, No. 16.

The Province was to remain in military occupation under Scott and Richards; the former as Senior and the latter as Junior Commissioner. Scott took charge of Lower Assam, while Richards acting under his orders, supervised Upper Assam. (1)

II. Assam after Yandabo.

Discussion on the future: Annexation of Lower Assam - By the Treaty of

Yandabo 26 February 1826, the king of Ava formally renounced his claim over Assam, Cachar and Jayantea. (2) The British Government was now at liberty to annex Assam, or if considered burdensome to leave it to a native prince.

At the beginning of the Burmese war, British intervention in the affairs of Assam had been actuated by a policy purely defensive in its immediate objectives. In a despatch of 20 February, 1824, it was distinctly made known to Scott that, although by the expulsion of the Burmese from the territory of Assam, the country would of right belong to the Government by conquest, the Governor-General in Council did not contemplate the permanent annexation of any part of it to the British dominions. (3) Scott, who echoed the same

(1) B.S.P.C. 5 Apr. 1825, No. 25.

(2) Aitchison - Treaties and Engagements, etc. page 230.

(3) B.S.P.C. 20 Feb. 1824, No. 15.

(1)
 sentiments in a proclamation to the Assamese on the eve of the march of the British troops now suggested the necessity of retaining Lower Assam with a view to defraying the expenses of the occupying forces, while restoring Upper Assam to a native prince. Although there was a change in his tone, Scott still emphasised the importance of conciliating the Ahom nobility who had been ruling in Upper Assam for the last six centuries. The introduction of British rule, he rightly conceived, could be only at the sacrifice of Ahom interests and would naturally provoke their bitter discontent. Apart from that, Scott pointed out, that in a country unaccustomed to money payment the revenue of Upper Assam hardly reached a lakh of rupees and therefore the Government would not gain by its annexation. On the other hand, he expected a revenue of not less than three lakhs from Lower Assam. (2)

Besides, this part of the country formed a distinct region; the inhabitants of which had been treated in a most humiliating manner by the Ahom Raja and his officials. As Scott said, upon them "all sorts of indignities were heaped" and (3)

(1) Home Misc. vol. 662, pp.173-5.

(2) B.S.P.C. 7 Mar. 1828, No. 4.

(3) B.S.P.C. 5 Apr. 1825, No. 27; See also Allen; District Gazetteer of Kamrup, page 39. Mr Allen goes so far as to say that, the natives of the district were not allowed even to remain within the fort of Gauhati after nightfall. There might be reasons to presume that the people of Kamrup were not treated with the same amount of cordiality as was meted out to the blue-blooded Ahoms. In the absence of strong evidence, it is rather difficult to believe that the Ahom Raj could afford to have a relationship approximating to enmity with those subjects whose support and loyalty he must have counted on throughout the prolonged wars with the Mughals.

he was therefore hopeful that by far the greatest portion of them would prefer the British Government to their old masters.

The Future of Upper Assam left undecided.

The Governor-General in Council concurred fully with Scott's recommendations and decided ^{in March, 1828} on the permanent annexation of Lower Assam, but not on the proposed restoration to a 'native prince' of the other portion of the Province. Denying that any pledge had been given, such an arrangement was considered to be inexpedient and undesirable. In their view "the native Government for its extreme poverty and limited resources, is dependent on the support of foreign powers and the remarkable incapacity (would) prove very inefficient and unable to command the respect of its subjects, while its necessities would divert to plunder and oppress them." ⁽¹⁾

There was also the question of the future security of the Eastern Frontier. Unless the ruler of Upper Assam was capable enough to guard that strategic frontier, the interposition of a weak foreign state between the British frontier, which now extended as far as Sadiya, and the headquarters of the British Government was viewed as highly inconvenient. ⁽²⁾ Above all, even providing for liberal pensions to the dispossessed royal families and other dignitaries, and with the expense of a workable establishment, there had

(1) B.S.P.C. 7 Mar. 1828, No. 8.

(2) B.S.P.C. 27 June, 1828, No. 116.

(1)

always been a surplus however insignificant. Upper Assam might not be a valuable asset, but equally it was not a liability. On the whole, it appears that the altered policy of the Supreme Government was influenced by the question of the security of the North East Frontier of Bengal and of the ultimate gain to be derived in future from the revenues of Upper Assam.

Scott remained consistent. He was conscious of his own commitments. He indeed felt the pulse of the people, an influential section of whom still cherished hopes of the return

(1)(Vide Appendix A; also B.S.P.C. 30 May, 1829, No. 9; B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 57.) Immediately after British occupation, the surplus figures for the years 1825-26 and 1826-27, as appear in the statements, were far from being satisfactory while in the next year 1827-28, the total charge exceeded those of the receipts occasioned by the total suspension of collection and public business for a considerable time, due to the extensive outbreak of cholera in various parts of Upper Assam. However, a considerable amount of arrears had been realised in the following year. With the result, that the net revenue for the years 1827-28 and 1828-29 exhibits a fairly good surplus of 19,428-0. Thenceforth, under the efficient management of Captain Neufville, while the total charge on average remained the same, the net revenue was on the increase.

of the good old days. Taking a realistic view of the situation, in his despatch of 26 April, 1828, he most emphatically urged that, "I must confess that I should doubt our being able, with the best intentions, to ensure at an expense to which the people of Upper Assam would willingly submit such a degree of good Government in that country as might compensate the various classes in society, for what we must in the first instance deprive them of."⁽¹⁾

The above despatch induced the Supreme Government not to take a hasty decision. Despite his subsequent preoccupation with matters affecting the security of Assam, Scott never failed to urge the expediency of restoration, but in fact, five years were yet to elapse before the Supreme Government became convinced of the propriety of the experiment proposed by him.

The future of Upper Assam remained undecided. Colonel Richards remained there till the middle of 1826, when he departed on furlough. Pending the termination of martial law in Assam till May 1828, the office of Junior Commissioner was held by Colonel Cooper, after which it was replaced by the office of the Political Agent in Upper Assam.⁽²⁾

In the meantime Scott had been assisted by the services of Captain Davidson at Gowaipana. Notwithstanding that appointment, Scott with his enlarged jurisdiction on the whole of the

(1) B.S.P.C. 27 June, 1828, No. 115.

(2) B.S.P.C. 7 Mar., 1828, No. 8.

North East Frontier was so much overburdened with multifarious duties, that another assistant Captain Adam White had to be appointed to aid him in his civil duties, with headquarters at Gauhati. (1)

III. Administrative Measures under Scott.

Policy: Whatever might be the ultimate decision as to the future of the Province, an efficient organisation to ensure peace and tranquillity was now urgently needed. To a thoroughly devastated country where institutions were completely disorganised and the people were reduced to utter destitution, the "paternal system" introduced by the Regulation X might well be adapted. Besides, so imperfect was the Government's knowledge of the country, that it could hardly furnish any instructions to the Commissioners. The task before Scott, on whom mainly fell the administrative arrangements, was therefore formidable. He had, however, vision of the needs and aspirations of a people newly brought under the rule of the British, feeling that "Changes for the better must be gradual or they were like to be changes for the worse." He also realised that in Upper Assam, the seat of the former Government and the stronghold of the Ahom nobility, the introduction of any measure affecting their interests would be strongly resented and would be treated as an intrusion upon their ancient rights. It was, however, different in Lower Assam, which had been under

(1) B.S.P.O. 16 Dec. 1828, No. 25.

Muslim rulers for a long time and its political and social institutions were more or less akin to the neighbouring districts of Bengal and therefore easily amenable to the new system.⁽¹⁾ But in either case he was required to soften, if not entirely obliterate, the opposition of the vested interests. For the successful working of the administrative arrangements, therefore, Scott was fully convinced of the utmost importance of adapting the new measures as closely as practicable to the people's actual wants, prejudices and condition and specially of continuing to employ the leading men of the country, in the discharge of the duties of the hereditary offices, subject of course to the supervision of European officers.

Revenue administration: Early Settlements (1824-27).

The realisation of a substantial revenue being the prerequisite of an efficient administration, Scott's attention was directed at the beginning to that object. He based his revenue measures entirely on his earlier system. In fact among the ruins of the Khelwari system Scott laid the foundation of British rule in Assam. For executive details the Khel system was retained intact. In lieu of personal service and produce, collections were now demanded in cash. The entire collection of revenue was placed in Upper Assam in charge of a Tahsildar Janardan Bar Barua, a former officer

(1) B.S.P.C. 7 Mar. 1828, No. 4.

of rank. He was aided in his work by a host of 'Kheldars'⁽¹⁾ - Hazarikas, Saikias and Boras. Lower Assam, consisting of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong formed one collectorate, with a European officer residing at Gauhati.

The district of Kamrup ^{was} being divided into 26 parganas,. In each paragana settlements were made with ^{the} choudhuris, whose predecessors had served in the same capacity under the former Government. He had the services of a Patwari (an accountant) and Thakurias (Petty collectors); all receiving rent-free lands as remuneration. They held office during the pleasure of the Government and were liable to be removed in case of defalcation, although members of the same family were usually appointed as their substitutes.⁽²⁾

In 1824-5, the district of Nowgong and Raha was placed under the management of two Sezvals,⁽³⁾ Lata Paniphuken and Aradhan Roy. At the same time, a settlement was made in Darrang with Raja Bijaynarayan who had been a vassal of the Ahom Raja, paying an annual tribute of Rs.10,000. His authority seems to have been so insecure at the time of settlement through the rivalry of other members of his family, that he foolishly committed himself to the sum of Rs.42,000⁽⁴⁾ besides supplying 1,500 pykes to the British Government.

(1) B.S.P.C. 7 July, 1826, No. 31.

(2) B.S.P.C. 5 April, 1825, No. 27.

(3) B.G. File No. 642 of 1842; Matthie to Jenkins.

(4) B.S.P.C. 5 April, 1825, No. 27.

Survey: The settlements were made on the basis of certain "Perakagaz" (Registers) of a survey undertaken during the reign of Ahom King Siva Singha⁽¹⁾ (1714-44). The data was "of so ancient a date affording little insight into the existing state of things" that a survey of lands had to be immediately undertaken in Lower Assam by a party of native Ameeris under Mr. Mathews while the same work had been entrusted in Upper Assam to a commission of four Assamese officers of rank.⁽²⁾

Sources of Revenue: Now we must turn to the sources from which the early settlements were made. As money became "the object of desire rather than servitude" a tax of rupees two (Gadhan) was imposed on the pykes for which he was given three puras of arable land (Gamati). In Kamrup, Raja Chandrakanta is said to have introduced a house tax, the Kharikatana, which was now kept up and extended to Darrang and Nowgang "with the object of equalising the burden of taxation on all classes."

In Nowgang it became a "poll tax" of Rs.1/- for each pyke; in Darrang it was a tax on the hearth, "Charoo", calculated on the number of mess pots in each household @ 8 annas for each and Rs. 1/- for above; while in Kamrup the Kharikatana was levied on the number of ploughs. Every individual family working 3 ploughs was called first class (uttam), those with two ploughs were second class (Madhyam) and those working one inferior (samanya). On these three classes tax was levied @ Rs.1/- for each plough, but every bondsman or slave was also taxed @ 8 annas or half a plough, whether he possessed one or not.

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- (1) The survey began by Raja Siva Singha (1714-44) and was concluded in the reign of his successor Raja Pramatta Singha (1744-51). Bhuyan, Padya Buranji, pp. 64 and 72.
- (2) B.S.P.C. 26 August 1825, Nos. 65-6; Bhuyan, Padya Buranji, page 190.

The duties on hats, ferries and fisheries, usually by farming, still continued. Finally, having found enormous quantities of rent free grants - the Debottar, Dharmottar and Brahmottar in Kamrup and Nankar in Darrang, with the precedent of levying a cess on them by the former Government, Scott assessed the rent-free grants in Kamrup at the rate of half of the pyke lands. The Nankar tenures belonging to the Rajas of Darrang were taxed at 8 as a pura and 5 as for other individuals.⁽¹⁾

It appears from early revenue papers, that except for a poll tax of nine rupees per 'gote' of 3 pykes or three rupees each, no tax was levied in Upper Assam. In fact Scott was so highly impressed with the propriety of surrendering Upper Assam to a native prince, that he considered "the realisation of any substantial revenue" from that part of the country "as a matter of secondary importance" compared with that of conciliating the influential classes in Society.⁽²⁾

Scott's miscalculations - He had extravagant hopes in Lower Assam, from which he expected a revenue of a lakh and a half immediately after occupation; this, according to his calculations, would increase to one of six lakhs in the course of a few years.⁽³⁾ The early estimates of receipts (vide Appendix A)

(1) B.R.C. 25 Aug. 1830, No. 23: Matthi to Robertson, 14 Jan. 1834.

(2) B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 50.

(3) B.S.P.C. 28 May, 1824, No. 15; also 5 April, 1825, No. 27.

however, belied his expectations. The general survey made by Mr. Matthews in 1827 revealed that in Lower Assam two thirds of the land remained uncultivated; of the arable portion again about one fifth was held under rent-free grant. Remissions had also to be granted on account of mufasil collections, flight of ryots, mistakes or deficiency of assets. Above all, under the previous government the parguna rates were so low,⁽¹⁾ that in spite of the existing rates being considerably enhanced, the net revenue could hardly reach Scott's figures.

Sources multiplied - Being disappointed in his calculations and convinced of the impossibility of raising the existing rates, Scott directed his attention to new sources. He found thousands of acres of assessable land undisposed of in consequence of the wholesale deaths and desertions during the Burmese invasions. Pykes were now given, in addition to their Gamati, a further assignment of 3 puras, as 'Jammamati', at a low rate of 7 annas (Jamma Dhan) a pura. What remained after this double allotment was thrown on the choudhuries to dispose of by another assessment. The cultivation of the poppy afforded a fair field of taxation. The number of opium eaters was so great, and the drug was so extensively cultivated, that Scott

(1) B.S.P.C. 9.March 1827, No. 11.

Scott himself admitted, that rates varied from rupee one and annas eight to four annas for lands of the best quality. Inferior lands were either exempted altogether from payments or assessed at one third of the above.

could not resist the temptation of urging on the Supreme Government the necessity of making a separate assessment on opium lands. (1)

The tax on rent-free grants, originally an emergency cess was continued, with the ultimate intention of "either reducing the amount of assessment below the present rate or in time of peace to appropriate the entire sum for

purposes of obvious public utility." (2) Finally, to cover the expense of the amufasil police and contingencies, a cess

"Barangani" was ordered to be levied varying from 6 to 8 annas a rupee on the total jamma. (3)

Acute scarcity of the circulating medium - Expedients were adopted, as mentioned above, one after another. The cumulative effect of this, it was obvious, increased the burdens of the people, who had not the means whereby to meet their obligations. Grain was their only produce, and was neither in demand in an agricultural country nor exportable under existing circumstances. In some parts salt, iron hoes, munjeet, muga cloth, etc., passed

(1) B.S.P.C. 9 March, 1827. No. 18.

(2) Ibid.

(3) A Rubakari (Revenue Proceedings) of the commissioner's office dated 25 May, 1831, runs as follows:- "This day a Rubakari dated 13th May, 1831, has been received from the collector of Gauhati, whence it appears that for the expenses of the police and suzwals, and miscellaneous charges he wishes to establish in Kamrup and throughout the country the rule laid down in a Rubakari of this Office dated 16th April for the division of Raha viz. that the Baragani on these accounts be levied should be fixed at 6 or 8 annas in each rupee of the Jamma. Therefore it is ordered that a copy of the Rubakari be sent to the collector in order that he may fix the Baragani in the manner above stated." B.P.C. 30 May, 1830, No. 83.

Jamma in P.W.S. Gross Collection

as currency instead of money and were usually accepted as such by a few considerate collectors who had consequently some difficulty in converting them into cash. This was rather an exception than the general rule. In fact, the limited demands in cash under the former Government had reduced the quantity of coin required for circulation. The introduction of money exchange, without a substantial addition to the existing currency consequently fell heavily on a people unaccustomed to so many payments in cash! Thus, they were relieved of personal service, only to be involved in hardships, which they could hardly overcome and which forced them ultimately to leave their hearths and homes to look for shelter with conditions easier if not better. ⁽¹⁾

Administration of civil and criminal justice: Introduction of Native Courts: - We now turn to the machinery instituted for the administration of civil and criminal justice. In the beginning of the period under review, the commissioners received complaints and took cognizance of all cases of first instance

(1) With reference to the effects of the commutation of service, Scott observed, in a dispatch to the Government, that it failed "to produce either an adequate pecuniary collection to the Government or satisfaction to the pykes, who being relieved from the necessity of labouring a certain number of months for the state, found themselves in difficulties, which induced many of them to desert the country and settle themselves in Bhutan and particularly Cachar where the cultivation was subject to a very trifling imposition compared with that levied in Assam." B.S.P.C. 27 June, 1828, No. 45.

and were empowered to award punishments, "consistent with justice" to the extent of 5 stripes, hard labour and imprisonment with or without transportation for life, while offences involving capital punishment were tried by a court martial. (1)

Apart from their ignorance of the native character and want of local knowledge, the growing pressure of civil business made it incumbent on them to set up a few native courts. In the early part of 1826, a beginning was made in Upper Assam with the appointment of Lambodar Barphukan, a brother-in-law of Ex-Raja Chandrakanta, to act as coadjutor in civil cases with the Bar-Barua of the Revenue Department. At the same time, to decide summary suits a number of standing committees, the "Surrasurree" panchayets, were instituted. These consisted of "State pundits" who had served in the same capacity under the former Government. Criminal cases of minor importance were tried by the commissioner himself or referred to ^{the} Barphukan who had been vested with powers of sentencing to 30 stripes, imprisonment for six months or a fine to the extent of fifty rupees. Trials of more serious offences were held before juries with the Barphukan as the President, and with decisions subject to revision by the commissioner, who might also award the punishment according to his own judgment. (2)

(1) B.S.P.C. 5 April, 1825, No. 24.

(2) Bhuyan S.K. Padya Buranji, page 191.
B.S.P.C. 7 July, 1826, No. 31.

Court of Justice under Scott - In Lower Assam, the Senior Commissioner was expected to try all criminal cases short of capital offences, while in civil cases there seems to have been no limit to the amount for which a suit was cognizable by the commissioner.⁽¹⁾ Captain Adam White, who had been Assistant to Scott in his civil duties, in a memoir of the late Commissioner, says that "Mr Scott admitted, as much as was possible, of the most complete access to his person; his Kutchery was at all times crowded; indeed, to a great degree which would have rendered it impossible for persons of an ordinary strength of constitution to have transacted business at all. The most unlimited freedom of petitioning was allowed without expense to the complainants. A large box was placed in the Kutchery into which the petitions could be thrown. To ensure despatch of business, they were limited to 25 or 30 lines; but no stamp tax or other restrictions existed. All proceedings in Court, and all petitions were written in the Bengalee or Assamese languages."⁽²⁾

Having always in mind the spirit of the new regulations

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- (1) There was, however, an exception in the process and form of trial in civil actions between the Gogaroos and the like or in which one of the parties may be of this description, which was to be followed as prescribed by the Governor-General in Council. Suits exceeding the amount of 5,000/- may be appealable to the Sadar Dewani Adawlat and in special cases appeals were allowed even under that amount: vide Regulation X, 1822, Articles VI and VII; vide Clark: Bengal Regulations.
- (2) Major White, A Memoir of the late David Scott, pp. 16-17.

"to establish a free communication between the Governors and the governed", and keenly solicitous as he was, for the well-being of a people who had unbounded confidence in him, Scott felt that justice should be cheap and the judgment seat well within the reach of all. Unquestionably, it was a great boon and various murders and other offences were brought to light, the rogueries of the Amlahs were often exposed, a free vent was afforded to the spirit of grumbling and above all "the most complete check was imposed upon his European subordinates, as the slightest complain against them was listened to and referred to these functionaries for an answer!"⁽¹⁾

In spite of the best of intentions, however, this system could not work. The unlimited facility of petitioning, in the absence of adequate machinery to deal with it, blocked up the doors of the court and the Judge became accessible only to a limited few. It proved humanly impossible on the part of the commissioner and his assistant to dispose of the civil suits, of landed property with countless subdivisions, involving conflicting rights and tenures, with the necessary promptitude. Inevitably, cases accumulated in their files. With the ever-increasing business, considerably augmented through the total suspension of administrative functions in the period of prolonged confusion, the machinery could not keep pace.

(1) Major White, A memoir of the late David Scott, page 17.

Native Courts in Lower Assam. - Towards the close of 1826, Scott found 1,500 petitions at the Court of Gauhati, requiring immediate decision. He was so much alarmed at the arrears that, without awaiting the sanction of the Supreme Government (1) he set up three native Tribunals.

- (a) The first Court consisting of one Rajkhowa and three assessors had the power of a Munshiff in Bengal. and the third Court consisted
- (b) and (c) The second/ ~~of the two Courts~~ in each of one Barphuken and three assessors. The former had the power of a Sadr Amin for the purpose of original suits and to decide appeals from the Courts of the Rajkhowa. The latter being vested with similar powers had to decide criminal cases of minor importance and to hear appeals from the Rajas, Choudhuris and other revenue officers, who were also allowed, according to former customs, to ~~exercise~~ judicial functions in their respective (2) jurisdiction.

(1) B.S.P.C. 16 Feb. 1827, No. 2.

- (2) In 1814, Munshiffs were to try cases not exceeding SR.64-0 and the Sadr Amin not exceeding S.R. 150-0 and neither of them were empowered to take cognizance of any suits in which a British European subject, or a European foreigner was a party. In 1821, the limits of the Sadr Amin were extended to S.R. 500/- with powers of trying petty cases and that of the Munshiffs to S.R. 150/-. The original jurisdiction of Sadr Amin was further raised in 1827 to S.R. 1,000 and he was also empowered for the first time to hear cases in which British European subjects were parties; while in 1831, monetary limits of the Munshiffs were raised to S.R. 300.

Field, C.D.; Regulations of the Bengal Code, pp.197-99.

Of these assessors one was constantly employed in each Court, to conduct the details of miscellaneous business, while the other two were attached to each of the Judges to form a Court, to serve as a check upon him and to expedite accumulated business.

A tentative arrangement was effected in this manner, for the disposal of civil and petty criminal cases. To the great delight of the commissioner, the tribunals proved "tolerably efficient" and their "proceedings highly satisfactory". In a letter to the Government of 29 March, 1828, expressing his satisfaction at the transaction of business by these Courts, Scott emphasised their suitability as an instrument not only for the dispensation of civil justice, but also for criminal cases, not excluding capital offence. The demand for a similar machinery to deal with capital cases was, in fact, equally urgent. In view of the frequency of murders and other heinous crimes and of the considerable number of cases pending for decision, it was felt that "there should be some means, rather than no means at all." More than once, Scott urged the necessity for the extension of the authority of the Court of Nizamat Adawlat to Lower Assam, and to obviate any delay in carrying out this suggestion, he solicited permission to make use of the Gauhati Court or any five of its members, as a Panchayet, to deal with capital offences. (1)

Influenced by Scott's recommendations, the Governor-

(1) B.S.P.C. 2 May, 1828, No. 11.

General in Council approved in 1828, "as an experiment", the existing machineries for the administration of the civil and criminal justice of the Province, subject to the superintendence of the Political Agent in Upper Assam (the Junior Commissioner being now substituted) and the Assistant to the Commissioner in Lower Assam, respectively. These officers were to apprehend and commit offenders and to exercise generally the authority and functions of a magistrate, and besides presiding over and regulating the proceedings of the local tribunals. Further, the same Courts were empowered to award or execute sentences not exceeding 3 years imprisonment, subject to the right of appeal to the Commissioner in all cases.

Court for Capital offences- At the same time a Panchayet was provided for the trial of capital offences in Lower Assam; it consisted of three members as judges, two pundits and six assessors. In cases of "grave and more heinous criminality" the proceedings were to be transmitted to the Commissioner, who was now empowered to adjudge proper punishment, at times even without previous reference to the Supreme Government. (1)

Mufasil Panchayets - Being aware of the concentration of judicial business at the Sadr Station, Scott erected also a number of Mufasil Panchayets in the populated districts of Nowgong, Kaliabar and Charduar in central Assam, to whom petty civil suits

(1) B.S.P.C. 2 May, 1828, No. 13.

were referred, with a right of appeal to the higher Courts at Gauhati. The members of these Panchayets were generally elected by the people and were remunerated not by fixed salary, but by a number of pykes and other immunities. (1)

Observations on the working of the Judicial system - The native tribunals, besides relieving considerably the burdens of the European officers, proved equally useful in meeting the ends of justice. Although the business of the Court was conducted mainly by the man of ability among them, he could by no means exert undue influence on the opinion of his colleagues, whose orders, as Scott remarked, "were generally correct and agreeable to the customs of the country." (2) Their decisions, although not guided by any code of laws, being founded on good evidence and when not tempered by sinister motives, were usually conformable to equity and good sense. The trials were, however, exceedingly tedious, telling seriously upon the parties and witnesses concerned. Scott observed that "the small number of cases decided does not appear to be attributable to any want of industry, but rather to their inexperience in our mode of conducting business as well as to the slothful and irregular habits of the persons employed in the capacity of peons to serve the process of the Court." (3) Delay was unavoidable, even on the part of the European officers, on whom alone rested

(1) B.S.P.C. 16 Feb. 1827, No. 2.

(2) B.S.P.C. 2 May, 1828, No. 11.

(3) B.P.C. 12 Mar., 1830, No. 22.

the final adjudication. Owing to their imperfect knowledge of the languages of the country they had to conduct the proceedings with great caution and due deliberation. In consequence arrears were so numerous and decisions so delayed, as to amount to a virtual denial of justice. Further, the various systems of appeals and the practices of deciding trifling cases by written pleadings and depositions, were not well adapted to a people almost all of whom were illiterate and consequently felt little confidence in the justice of the decision. Above all, the mufasil Courts being few and far between, the concentration of the Courts of Justice at the station rendered it impossible to the interior districts to obtain speedy justice. The suitor must present himself at the Court perhaps after a matter of two to three days' journey and nobody knew how long he might be required to stay for the finish of his case. He must, at the same time, be well equipped with provisions for the whole period; when they ran short, he had to hurry back home, leaving his case behind to take its own course.

Police - Nevertheless, the establishment of an efficient police could have ensured peace and security to the people. But this seems to have been entirely neglected during the early period under review; nor was it considered as an urgent concern of the Government so long the defence of the frontier was secured. At each Sadr Station, an establishment was kept up consisting of a Daroga, one Jamadar, two Daffadars and 20 military men with police

duties, receiving on that account Rs.2/- each, while mufasil police was left entirely at the hands of the Rajas, Chaudhuris, Patgiri~~s~~ and other revenue officers. As a matter of fact, the maintenance of peace and order was considered to be a joint responsibility of the people themselves. In cases where they failed to prevent crime or arrest criminals, thereby requiring the deputation of a regular Police force, the expense thereof had to be realised by a Barangani, or collective fine (1) on the inhabitants of the disturbed area.

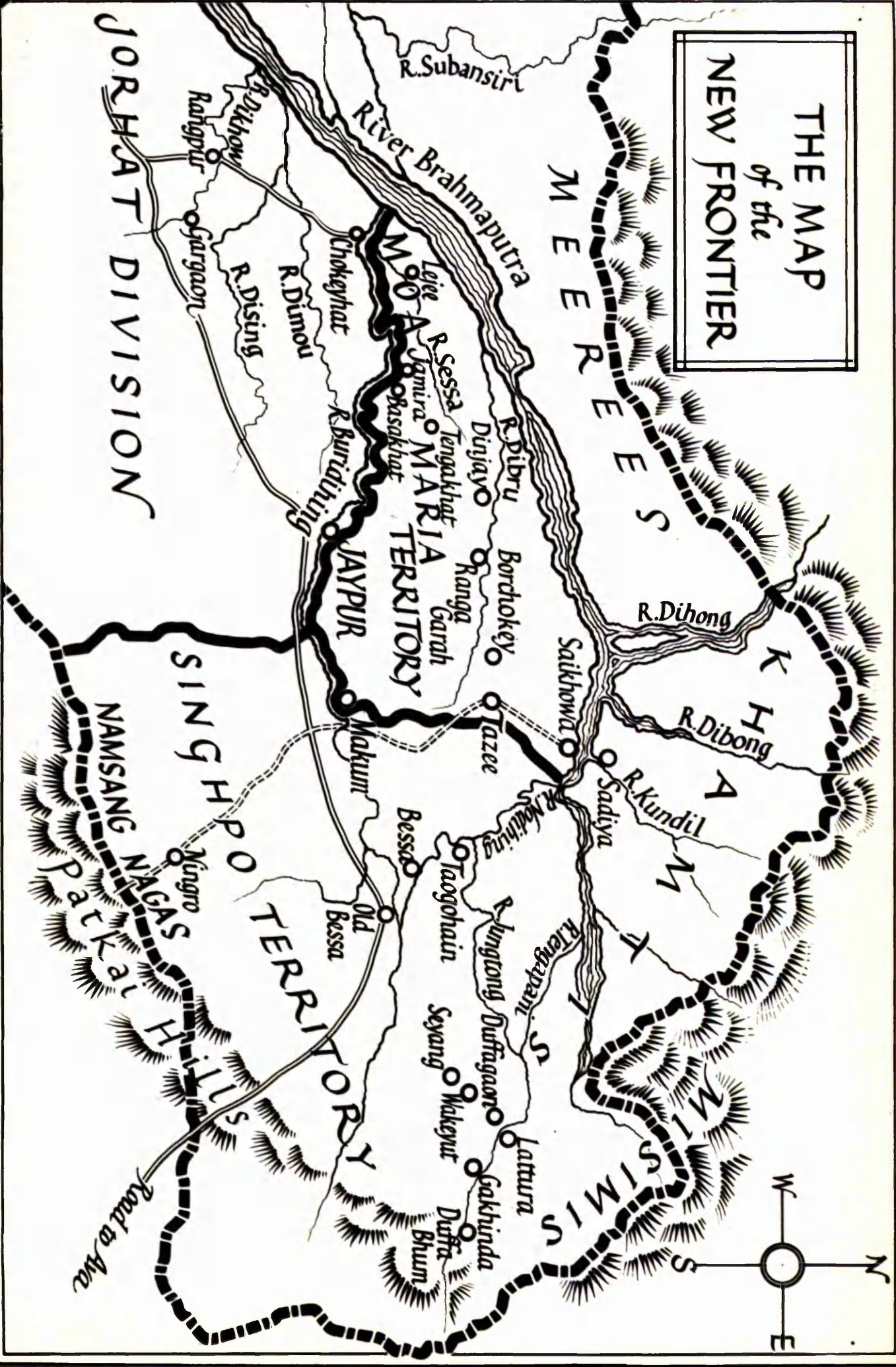
Thus, in the framework of the earlier system, the personal Government of Scott manifested itself. The arrangements he made were on the whole well adapted to the needs of the people. It was, however, the unwritten law of the system, that the officer concerned must know everything, be accessible at all times and be able to check acts done under cover of law. It required, therefore, not only the pick of men, but also an adequate number of them. The destinies of about a million of souls, living in an area of over 27,000 square miles (2) were, however, entrusted in Assam to a couple of new military officers, who were always liable to be called away at the urgent demand of the

(1) B.S.P.C. 16 Feb., 1827, No. 2.

(2) B.S.P.C. 14 July, 1826, No. 2; C.D. 3 Dec. 1834, No. 14; Parliamentary Papers No. 28, page 401; I.P.C. 2 Nov. 1828, No. 100. Capt. Jenkins stated, that from the frontier of Cooch Behar to the Eastern Frontier of Assam was upwards of 400 miles with a breadth on an average of 60 miles, giving an area as mentioned above.

regiment. Evidently, the objects alluded to could hardly remain more than a distant ideal. To comment severely upon the activities of a Neufville or ~~Major~~ White, would indeed be unjust. They gave under the most trying circumstances their best services and in a few years proved themselves fully equal to their civil duties. But the fact remains, their ignorance of the customs, character, language and institutions subjected the people in the interim to grave injustice. If they were strangers to the people, their underlings were no less strangers to their ideas and system of government. The connecting link between the Government and the governed was inevitably formed by the "Amlah", largely imported from Bengal. The latter without any permanent interest in the land, naturally felt tempted to exploit the situation to the best advantage. Evidently, against its expressed wish the Government had to trust those, whom they professed not to trust, lest all business should be brought to a standstill. Yet being trusted, without confidence, without respect, without distinct responsibility and without adequate emolument, their power of abusing trust was multiplied. Besides, the process of infiltration, which thus began, widened the gulf between the earlier and the new rulers, aggravated the transitional misrule and created problems, political and economic, for which no final solution has yet been reached.

THE MAP
of the
NEW FRONTIER



CHAPTER TWO.

THE NEW FRONTIER (1825-28)

The Eastern Frontier of Assam had remained a "Terra Incognita" to the British till the early decades of the last century. The explorations and surveys of Wood, Bedford, Wilcox, Burlton, Jenkins and Pemberton dispelled the gloom and revealed the mysteries of a region so important politically, stretegetically and commercially. ⁽¹⁾ From this quarter, an offensive against the Chinese Empire could be carried on, the Burmese invaders could be effectively resisted, and the defence of the Eastern Frontier could also be permanently secured. Besides, there were

- (1) In 1765 Major James Rennel traversed the area where the Bengal districts ended and Assam began. Ensign Wood who accompanied Captain Welsh (1792-94) surveyed the country as far as Rangpur. Dr. John Peter Wade, a medical officer under the Captain compiled a Geography of Assam based on information obtained from his own observations and from reports of the Assamese, which was subsequently published in Martin's Eastern India, vol. III, pp. 626-59. Shortly after British occupation Lieut. Burlton and Captain Bedford traced the source of the river Brahmaputra; while Lieuts. Wilcox and Neufville pushed still further into the country to the east of Rangpur. In 1832, Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton under orders of the Government surveyed the North-East Frontier including Cachar, Manipur and the Khasia Hills. For further details see Selection of Papers regarding the Hill tracts between Assam and Burma; Memoir of a Survey of neighbouring countries in 1825-28, pp.1-83; See Wilson, H., Documents, Appendix pp.1-xv; Pemberton: Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India; Wade, J.P. A Geographical Sketch of Assam attached fo 'An Account of Assam'; Bhuyan, S.K. East India Company's Relations with Assam, 1771-1826, pp. 813-16.

the possibilities of peaceful economic penetration to the countries inhabited by the Kachins and Shans, who had both the means and inclination to buy European merchandise.

The insecurity of the Eastern districts of Bengal brought the British to the affairs of Assam, the defence of the latter brought them face to face with the numerous hill tribes in the New Frontier. The British occupation of Upper Assam was, in fact, followed by immediate and direct contacts with the Moamarias, Khamtis and Singphos, who had their settlements in the country north east of Rangpur. Before any discussion on the political relations with these tribes, it is essential to have a knowledge of their social and political organisation, which had an important bearing on the subject.

I. The Moamarias, Khamtis and Singphos.

The territory of the Moamarias or Muttocks included the whole area south of the Brahmaputra from ^{the} Buri Dihing as far as its junction ^{with} No Dihing in the east. During the period of insurrection, the Moamarias having expelled Ahom Raja Gaurinath Sing, set up about 1784 two chiefs of their own, one at Rangpur and another at Rangagora, on the bank of the river Dibru, whose coins bear testimony to the assertion of their independence. The chief of Rangpur was not allowed to enjoy the fruits of victory for a long time. In 1794, British detachments under Captain Welsh enabled Raja Gaurinath to recover his throne, by driving back the insurgents, who thereupon

concentrated at their eastern stronghold. During the remaining period of Gaurinath's reign and those of his successors Kamaleswar and Chandrakanta, though repeated attempts had been made to subdue them, the Moamarias remained unconquered. (1) In fact their chief had become so formidable through the morale and loyalty of his followers, that ultimately Purananda Buragohain the Premier, had to acknowledge him as the vassal of the Ahom Raj and was honoured with the title of 'Barsenapati.' His allegiance to his sovereign was merely nominal and that too, ceased in the period of confusion which followed soon after. Nevertheless his vow of poverty, astute diplomacy and above all the geography of his country "so full of jungles" left him free and his subjects comparatively unmolested by the Burmese invaders.

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- (1) On the pressure of attacks of the Ahoms, as Hannay reported, the Moamarias repeatedly invoked the aid of the Burmese and also succeeded in bringing them twice into Assam, through the aid of Beesa Gaum and also of Hekap Gohain, a Khamti chief. The Burmese were however, persuaded to return by the bribery of the Premier Buragohain, who subsequently relaxed his severity against the Moamarish Sect and the country at present occupied by Barsenaputtee; J.A. S.B. 1838, p. 4675
 Robinson, W: Descriptive Account of Assam, pp. 328-29.

Thus, he had not only maintained his independence, during the period of war with Ava, but so successfully defended his country that the inhabitants of the surrounding region flocked to Muttock as an asylum from the oppression of the 'Mauns' and Singphos; it has been reported that "on the arrival of the British, he was found with all the semblance of an independent prince, at the head of a country containing upwards of 50,000 inhabitants."⁽¹⁾

The Khamtis - The Khamtis (Burmese Hkamti) were descended from the Bor Khamtis⁽²⁾ a powerful race, who inhabited a valley high up the sources of the river Irrawadi, in lat. 27°-28° east of Sadiya. They belonged to the Shan stock and were described by M'Cosh as "a tall, fair and handsome race, considerably advanced in civilization and are endowed with no small share of military courage. They are among the few tribes who have a written character and can read and write the Burmese language and understand it when spoken. Their own language, though written and in character a good deal resembling Burmese, is quite different and closely resembles the original Ahom."⁽³⁾

The Khamti movement has been rightly regarded as "the

(1) Hannay: A Short Account of the M'Moamariah Sect. etc. J.A.S.B. 1838 pp. 671-79 : Neufville, Asiatick Research, 1828, Vol. XVI, pp. 333-4

(2) Gurdon, P.R.T; The Khamtis, J.R.A.S. (1895) pp. 157-8.

(3) M'Cosh, J. Topography, pp. 145-6.

(1)
 second instance of the "Tai migration" into Assam, which began from the middle of the 18th century. On account of their affinity in race and language, they were hospitably received by their kinsman in the province and were settled on the Tengapani river, in the neighbourhood of Sadiya. During the period of the civil wars following the accession of Raja Gaurinath, with a fresh exodus from their original home the Khamtis extended their settlements and considerably strengthened their position in the whole region of Sadiya and Saikhowa. Though remaining nominally under the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, the Ahom Viceroy on the frontier, they began to exercise considerable influence over the non-Khamtis, many of whom were reduced by them to a position of the utmost degradation and slavery. Their initial successes so much whetted their ambition, that they showed their pretensions even to the Ahom throne. On the death of Raja Gaurinath, as Buchanan tells us, "the Bura Gohaing invited the Raja of Khamti to an interview, under pretence of treating with him for the succession to the throne of Jorhat, as the right of all other descendants of Godadhar to the succession was considered doubtful. During the interview the unwary Raja was seized and put in confinement and the Assamese took possession of the greater part of Khamti." (2)
 Evidently, from 1797, there had been frequent clashes between the Ahoms and the Khamtis and the latter being hard pressed,

(1) Gurdon, P.R.T., The Khamtis, J.R.A.S. (1895) page 157.

(2) Martin, M; Eastern India, Vol. III. pp. 663-4.

had to quit Sadiya for a time. The success of the royalists was temporary. In the period of confusion which followed the Burmese war, the Khamtis, having identified their interests with the invaders, carried on their devastations far and wide and "took forcible possession of the country ejected the reigning chieftain, the Suddia Gowa Gohaing, and the Kangti chief, usurping his name and jurisdiction reduced his subjects to dependence and slavery. By a vigorous mode of government, and holding out an asylum to refugees from other states (the Khamtis) soon rose to prominence!"⁽¹⁾

The Singphos - They occupied the country, bounded on the north by the Brahmaputra, on the east by the Mishmā hills, on the south by the Patkai range and on the west by a line from the south of Sadiya terminating at the foot of the Patkai Hills.

The Singphos whom Captain Hannay regarded as the western branch of the Kachins (Kakheyn) of Hukawng valley were subdivided into three groups; Tenghai, Mayho and Nimbrong, residing in not less than a dozen of gaums or cantonments.⁽²⁾ The most important

(1) M'Cosh, J; Topography, page 145.

(2) Hannay; Sketch of the Singphos or the Kakhyens of Burma, Tract No. 266 pp 44. : B.S.P.C. 17 Mar. 1826, No. 25; Neufville to Scott 29 Feb. '26. Their new settlements on this side of the Patkai which bear the names of their original homes in the highlands or take the designation of their respective chiefs viz: Beesa Gaum, Duffa Gaum, Lattora, being patronyms of the chief or also the name of their principal strongholds.

were the chiefs of Beesa, Duffa, Lattora and Wakeyat. Each tribe being ruled by its own gaum, was held together by no acknowledged authority "nor by any bond of union, except for some temporary purpose of plunder." Different chiefs appeared, on a equality with each other in strength and resources and in fact, assumption of supremacy seems to have been one of the principal causes of their mutual feuds and quarrels. The Singphos entertained, as Butler remarks, "strange ideas of honour and revenge, compatible with their customs and rude notions of religion, a Singpho chief could not ever abandon without dishonour, the application of the Lex Talionis to one who had murdered his relative;A mistaken feeling of religion, combined with private affection for the deceased, fully accounts for this perverted state of mind. The Singphos imagine that the soul of the murdered individual will torment them until his means are appeased by the death of one of his enemies; and further, that the anger of the deity would be roused should an opportunity of retaliation be neglected"⁽¹⁾ Evidently, they never forgave an injury and feuds were generally kept alive from one generation to another.

Though proud and vindictive in the extreme, they were improvident and hopelessly indolent. They had, however, a number of dependents, who either through sheer want or in expectation of their daughters attached themselves to their

(1) Butler, J. A Sketch of Assam, page 84.

families and enabled them to cultivate their lands. As a matter of fact "the whole of the field work is performed by the women and slaves, while the men delight in lounging about the villages and basking in the sun when not engaged in hunting or war."⁽¹⁾

The weakness of the Ahom rulers afforded them ample opportunities to procure all they required - women, slaves and lowlands, so valuable to the hill people for their livelihood.⁽²⁾ Taking advantage of the Burmese invasions, they descended on the plains, "carried on their ravages with fire and sword" as far as the capital, plundering the temples, laying waste the country and carrying off the inhabitants into slavery. Thousands of wretched Assamese had been thus carried off, the greater part of whom had been sold to their kinsmen beyond the hills, while many of them were retained for their personal use in the plains.⁽³⁾

(1) Butler, J. A Sketch of Assam, page 81.

(2) At the beginning, their relations with the Assamese were quite friendly. In fact, on the failure of the Ahom kings to afford protection to their remote subjects, a large number of them voluntarily came under the direct authority of Gakhen Thoo, the predecessor of Duffa Gaum. "It is not therefore" as Hannay tells us "until the Burmese invasion we hear of these forays, which in the course of a very few years nearly depopulated the eastern districts. Then every chief far and near who could command a few men made a dash at the populous parts of the valley until the Assamese had been so heartbroken and helpless that it was not uncommon for one Singpho to drive 20 Assamese before him." (Hannay. Sketch of the Singphos, pp. 42-43).

(3) B.S.P.C. 17 Nov. 1826, No. 25.

II. Operations against the Singphos.

Events after the capitulation of Rangpur - The anarchical conditions caused by the depredations of the Khamtis and Singphos, inevitably demanded continued operations by the British forces even after the surrender of Rangpur by the Burmese on 31 January, 1825. Detachments were sent out every day under the command of Colonel Richards, Captain Martins and Lieutenant Neufville. But the marauders continued to infest the whole country to the east of Rangpur; their ravages, attended with revolting cruelties, reached, in fact, their climax in the weeks following the capitulation.⁽¹⁾ Scott felt the absolute necessity for the further advance of the British forces to the frontier and for guarding the strategic posts at Borhat, Jaypur and Sadiya. Apart from protecting the people, the continuance of the war with Ava rendered it essential that the said posts should be sufficiently strengthened, to resist any efforts on the part of the Burmese⁽²⁾ to dislodge the British occupation forces from Assam. At the same time Scott felt convinced of the paramount importance of bringing the Singphos under the sphere of British influence, by conciliation or otherwise, in order to liberate the Assamese captives in their possession and to neutralise their opposition, in case of any future operations against the Burmese. Actuated by such sentiments, he pointed out to the Government that "the

(1) Wilson, H; Documents No. 93; B.S.P.C. 20 May, 1825, Nos. 21-24.

(2) B.S.P.C. 20 May, 1825, No. 24.

abandonment of that part of the country near Sadiya would necessarily most seriously injure our reputation and character for good faith, besides entailing ruin and misery upon thousands whom we are to protect, while it would put a permanent stop to the negotiations that have been commenced with the Singpho chiefs and deprive us in the event of there being a necessity for a Second Campaign of all the local influence and facilities for ulterior operations."⁽¹⁾

In the beginning of March, 1825, alarming news reached Rangpur that the Singphos having mustered 7,500 strong, at the mouth of ^{the} No Dihing, were about to fall upon Bar Senapati and Sadiakhwa Gohain; the latter, finding himself helpless, made frantic appeals for succour.⁽²⁾ Lieutenant Neufville⁽³⁾ of the 42nd Native Infantry was immediately directed to proceed to Sadiya. He was instructed to offer every encouragement to the Singpho chiefs as may be desirous of entering into engagement upon the basis of releasing all the captives taken since the capitulation of Rangpur, and to endeavour, by grant of annual stipend, or any such means, to the influential chiefs to prevent their depredations into the plains, and as a security for their good behaviour and fulfilment of their engagements, to demand of them one or two persons of consequence from each district as hostages.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Ibid. (2) B.S.P.C. 15 Apr. 1825, No. 13.

(3) Born at Lemington, 26 Jan. 1795. Educated at Eton. In 1811 began his career as a cadet in the Bengal Army, became Ensign in 1813 and Lieutenant in 1815. He took part in the First Burmese war in Arakan in 1825 and then transferred to Assam. Hodson; Major, Officers of the Bengal Army, Part II, pp.549-50.

(4) B.S.P.C. 20 May, 1825, No. 24; Scott to Neufville, 8 Apr. '25.

Accompanied by Lieutenant Kerr, Neufville arrived in the early part of April at the mouth of ^{the} No Dihing. Though he found the whole country on the North of the Brahmaputra thoroughly ravaged by plunder and devastation, no trace of the enemy was found in the neighbourhood of Sadiya. What appeared most striking to him was, that a number of messengers from Tao Gohain (brother of Sadiyakhwa Gohain) Lattora, Lattagong and even of Beesa, approached him, expressing not only their desire for the friendship and alliance of the British but even their willingness to give every assistance to penetrate to the Burmese frontier and to take the offensive against all other of their tribe, who refused to join the confederacy. ⁽¹⁾

It appeared rather paradoxical on the part of these predatory tribes, who had so long been the auxiliaries of the invaders and partaken of their plunder, that immediately on the arrival of Neufville, they should be prepared to come to terms and act in concert against the Burmese. The political situation of the Singpho country explained this absurdity. During the invasions, they had no other alternative, their "only option was to plunder others or to be plundered" and in fact, many suffered extortion and oppression at the hands of the Burmese ⁽²⁾ not unlike the wretched Assamese. Consequent upon their expulsion there remained only one party attached to their cause,

(1) B.S.P.C. 20 May, 1825, No. 26; Neufville to Capt. Martin, 13 Apr. '25.

(2) B.S.P.C. 10 June, 1825, No. 26; Neufville to Scott, 18 May, '25.

while the majority appeared to be hostile, at any rate neutral. On the top of this, the Singphos were now divided into two hostile camps - one led by Beesa and the other by Duffa Gaum; in fact, the latter was at this moment being threatened with attack by the former. ⁽¹⁾ The proposed alliance presented to the contending parties an opportunity for the gratification of their private enmity. Nothing, therefore, was impossible for the Singphos ~~then~~ when overwhelmed with personal vengeance and tribal feuds; and the situation evidently afforded Neufville opportunities to play one party against another to effect the desired object of bringing them under the "will and authority" of the British Government.

Final expulsion of the Burmese - Neufville had hardly made a reconnaissance of the country around him when he received intelligence of the approach of three chiefs from Mougong at the head of an army in the direction of ^{the} No Dihing. On 7 May, 1825, he started up the river with a number of followers and on the next day landed in front of the enemy's camp, and attacked it. The enemy fled in great confusion, leaving some dead and many wounded. ⁽²⁾ Being repulsed and perhaps apprehensive of a further advance by the British troops into their own country, the chiefs addressed the following letter to Neufville:-

(1) B.S.P.C. 20 May, 1825, No. 25. Neufville to Scott, Apr. First quarter, 1825.

(2) Wilson, H; Documents No. 94(A); Neufville to Capt. Martin, 9 May, 1825.

"Our object is to preserve to ourself the possessions which we have heretofore occupied. The boundaries which were fixed by Sukapha have not been overstepped by either nation from that to the present time. We entreat you for the sake of our wives and children who are sorely terrified, not to invade our possessions. We hope for this boon from your hands in accordance with the fair name with which your name is connected.

"The Assamese and ourselves have not been hitherto in hostility disposed to each other, on the contrary we have been mutually on the most fraternal terms. We in the spirit of the same principle make the present communication for an accordance of similar relations from your hands."(2)

There was a certain amount of truth in this statement so far as relations between the rulers of Rangpur and Mogoung were concerned. They were descended from the same Shan stock, as was evniced from frequent interchange of presents and Katakies (Ambassadors) between the two kingdoms. There may also have been some commercial intercourse, though many of the routes had fallen into disuse amidst the jungles. (3) Buchanan, writing in 1807-14 says:- "The language and customs of the people of Noya (Mogoung) are the same with those which formerly prevailed among the proper Assamese and between the two peoples there is still a constant friendly intercourse and many of the natives of Noya are always to be found at the court of Jorhat." (4)

(1) The first Ahom King of Assam (1228-1268) A.D.

(2) B.S.P.C. 10 June, 1825, No. 24.

(3) For details see Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of British India (1835) pp. 110-11; selection of papers regarding the Hill tracts between Assam and Burma, pp. 250-55.

(4) Martin H; Eastern India, vol. III, pp.663-

Nevertheless, in the confusion of the last decade, they appeared at best as opportunists and never hesitated to fish in the troubled waters, at the expense of their kinsmen in Assam. Whatever might be the objective in their recent advance towards^{the} No Dihing, Neufville's movements called a halt to their progress and they were placed on the defensive. Having erected a number of stockades at Beesa and Duffa they entrenched^{the} themselves therein with a following consisting of Singphos and Burmese.

It was evident to Neufville that there could be no settlement with the Singphos, nor was there any prospect of peace on the frontier, so long as the Burmese were at large; their very presence he must have felt, would always rally the turbulent elements. His reply to the chiefs - "If, my friends, you want us to quit the country of Assam, you had better come and turn us out" - indicated clearly his intention to follow up his successes till they were expelled from the frontier.

Accordingly, after the temporary suspension of operations for a few days owing to bad weather, Neufville's party continued their progress, dragging canoes up the No Dihing, and on 9 June, confronted the enemy at Duffa.⁽¹⁾ As soon as Lieutenant Kerr brought his men to the assault and began firing they were routed. Thereupon, the Burmese concentrated at Beesa. While Neufville was proceeding there, attempts were being made by

(1) Wilson; Documents No. 95; Neufville to Capt. Martin, 15 June, 1825.

Beesa Gaum to entice them into a trap, with the information that on the arrival of the fugitives from Duffa, the Burmese had left for their own country, that they had carried off all his people and property and therefore it was needless for Neufville to take the whole detachment there, since he could offer neither supplies nor assistance. Nothing, however, could deter Neufville from his onward move. He was well informed by the Scouts about the movements of the enemy in that quarter, and before long, within a mile from the last stockade at Beesa, it was found that the enemy forces were drawn up in a line with a detachment of cavalry on the right. A few volleys created confusion among the cavalry, while a bayonet charge practically ended the conflict. The enemy broke and were so closely pressed by a party under Ensign Bogle that they had to flee for their lives leaving several hundreds of captives behind.⁽¹⁾ The Burmese were thus expelled, although their machinations continued occasionally to disturb the peace on the frontier and inspired hopes in the minds of those who considered the British advance an encroachment upon their ancestral rights.

Liberation of Assamese Captives - Meanwhile, negotiations had been continued with the Singpho chiefs, and it appeared that they would sincerely prefer the British alliance, provided they were not subjected to the surrender of their captives, which stood as a decided bar to their agreement. Slaves, in fact,

(1) Ibid.

constituted their sole property. The value of each was estimated, according to age and sex, at between rupees 20 and 80 and each chief was supposed to possess from 40 to 60 slaves. It cannot therefore be wondered at that they should use every endeavour to retain them in their power or obviate the risk of losing them by a speedy sale to their hill neighbours. Neufville had every reason to suspect that after the expiry of the ensuing harvesting season, they would emigrate with their slaves across the hills and thus defeat the main object of his recent operations. Consequently, having seen the futility of these negotiations, he determined upon the forcible subjugation of the Singphos. Accordingly, after the expulsion of the Burmese, he called upon the Barsenapati and the Sadiya Khowa Gohain to aid him in a "general and sweeping descent" upon the Singphos before it was too late. (1)

On 27 July, 1825, strengthened with his auxiliaries Neufville arrived at Seyang, a village a few miles east of Bessa, and on the next day succeeded in rescuing 100 slaves from the fields of Namrup. The time was then highly opportune; the slaves had just been brought from their place of concealment to work in the fields. (2) From Seyang, which became the base of operations, the contingents pushed forward and the Singphos were

(1) B.S.P.C. 2 Sept. 1825, No. 21; Neufville to Scott, 25 June, 1825.

(2) B.S.P.C. 2 Sept. 1825, No. 23; Neufville to Scott, 2 Aug. '25.

practically hemmed in throughout the whole region from Lutta Bari to Beesa. Several chiefs attempted conciliation, often betraying their brother Singphos although they too had innumerable slaves in their possession. But Neufville was intelligent enough to see through their designs and quick enough to frustrate their attempts at evasion. The Gaum of Wakeyat, who had been materially helping the expedition, was found to have 200 slaves ready for despatch beyond the hills. He was immediately attacked and a considerable number of them were rescued. ⁽¹⁾ Another batch was liberated by a surprise attack on Lattora.

In the meantime, the auxiliaries attacked Beesa. The Gaum retired to the hills and prepared to resist to the last by organising a confederacy of the Singphos and disaffected Khamtis. His messengers even reached Hukawng. Considering the situation serious, Neufville, after directing Kerr to bring the reserves from Sadiya, immediately proceeded to Beesa. The result was decisive. The rapidity of his movements so much disconcerted their plans that the coalition was rendered impossible, and as a result, no alternative was left for the Singphos but to surrender their arms and captives. ⁽²⁾

Towards the close of 1825, operations against the Singphos came to an end with the submission of a number of

(1) B.S.P.C. 23 Sept. 1825, No. 10; Neufville to Scott,
4 Aug. '25.

(2) B.S.P.C. 30 Sept., 1825, No. 15; Neufville to Scott,
27 Aug. '25.

chiefs including Beesa Gaum. These campaigns, while exhibiting the might of the British demonstrated as well the dangerous consequences of any opposition to them. Exemplary punishments were meted out to recalcitrants like Duffa, whose villages were burnt, his crops destroyed and his cattle carried away.⁽¹⁾

Nonetheless the frontier was now at peace. The terror inspired by the Singphos was gradually removed and confidence restored in the minds of the inhabitants to return to their homes and villages. To crown all, not less than 5,000 Assamese captives had been liberated. These achievements were due to the energy, ability and intrepidity of Neufville, the invaluable assistance rendered by the auxiliaries and not least to the exertions of the captives themselves. Although little difference existed between a Singpho master and his slave - "they lived together, worked together, sat, conversed and acted upon terms of perfect equality"⁽²⁾ - the sense of servitude was so galling, the loss of liberty was so keenly felt, that the Assamese captives by their constant and secret communications, made the work of liberation easier; they seized their opportunity at the earliest approach of the British detachments under Neufville.

(1) B.S.P.C. 7 July, 1826, No. 22; Neufville to Scott, 13 Sept. '25.

(2) Bayfield, G.T.; Narrative of a journey from Ava to the frontier of Assam; selection of papers, page 225.

III. Agreements with the Chiefs and Administrative Arrangements.

As soon as the work of pacification was completed, the task of organisation began. Early in 1826, Scott paid a visit to Sadiya and on 5 May, 1826, sixteen Singpho chiefs entered into the following agreement:

"Assam now being under the sway of the British Government, we and our dependent Singphos, who were subjects of the Assam State, acknowledge subjection to that Government. We agree not to side with the Burmese or any other king to commit any aggression whatever, but we will obey the orders of the British Government."

"Whenever a British force may march to Assam to protect it from foreign aggression, we will supply that force with grain, etc., make and repair roads for them and execute every order that may be issued to us. We should on our doing so be protected by that force."

"If we abide by the terms of the agreement, no tribute shall be paid by us; but if any Assam Paeeks of their own accord reside in our village the tax on such Paeeks will be paid to the British Government."

"We will set at large or cause to be liberated any Assam people whom we may seize and they shall have the option to reside wherever they please."

"If any of the Singphos rob any of the Assam people residing in our country, we will apprehend the former and surrender them to the British Government, but if we fail to do so, we will make good the loss thus sustained by the latter."

"We will govern and protect the Singphos under us as heretofore and adjust their differences and if any boundary dispute occur among us we will not take up arms without the knowledge of the British Government."

"We will adhere to the terms of this Agreement and never depart from them. This Agreement shall be binding upon our brothers, sons, nephews and relatives in such a way as the Agent to the Governor-General may deem proper. We have executed this Agreement in the presence of many." (1)

(1) Aitchison, Treaties & Engagements etc. pp. 119-20.

Having realised that there could be no pacification on the Frontier until the reduction of such chiefs as still continued to be refractory, a proclamation was issued by Scott demanding their immediate surrender under pain of confiscation of property and expulsion from Assamese territory. To enquire into their movements and to ascertain whether the signatories of the treaty executed their terms faithfully, an intelligence department was organised at Sadiya, while at the same time, Beesa Gaum the most influential chief was made the official channel of communication with the British Government. He was invested "with some degree of authority over the rest." His duties were mainly those of giving immediate information to the British authorities of anything that might occur in the vicinity of the frontier calculated to excite apprehension. (1)

Agreements were likewise made, on 13 May, with the MateeBar Barsenpati and two days after with Salan Sadiakhowa, the former being required to furnish 140 fighting men and 140 labourers, the latter 40 fighting men, 20 labourers and 10 boatmen. (2)

In view of the existing collisions amongst these chiefs and their past hostility to the Ahom rulers, it was felt highly desirable to retain them under the direct control of the Government, and it may also have been considered doubtful if such an important frontier could safely be left in the

(1) B.S.P.C. 14 July, 1826, No. 9; B.P.C. 4 Sept. 1834, No. 60. Scott to Bedingfield.

(2) Aitchison - Treaties & Engagements, pp. 121-22.

hands of these newly made allies, whose fidelity was yet to be tested.

By a despatch of 7 March, 1828, the office of Political Agent was created in Upper Assam. Captain Neufville was appointed to that post and the new frontier was placed under his immediate supervision. Nonetheless, the active interference of the British authorities seems to have been considerably limited, since the same order distinctly pointed out that "in the management of these rude tribes to vest a large share of responsibility in the hands of the natural chief and to direct our efforts principally to the maintenance of peace between the different communities and the experiment of the few and simple conditions of such engagements as is indispensably necessary to impose on them." (1)

In place of the Ahom Raj, the chiefs of the Moamarias, Khamtis and Singphos were now brought under the immediate control of the British Government. Subject, however, to the supply of a number of contingents, they were left free in their respective jurisdictions and were entirely exempted from taxation. They were invested with the power of enquiring into and deciding civil and minor criminal cases; but in the event of murder, dacoity and heinous crimes, having made the preliminary investigation, they were to transmit the papers to a Supreme Court instituted for the purpose with the Political Agent as the President. However, the proceedings were to be submitted to the chief of the accused and the sentence was to be carried out under his authority. (2)

(1) B.S.P.C. 7 Nov. 1828, No. 8.

(2) Ibid; Neufville to Scott, 23 Dec. 1827.

Thus, a criminal jurisdiction was organised guaranteeing the much cherished rights of the tribal chief, but preserving at the same time the prerogatives of the Crown.

IV. The Defence and Security of the Frontier.

Withdrawal of Regular Troops - In 1823, the defence of the North East Frontier had been entrusted to the Rangpur Local Corps, formerly known as the "Cuttack Legion", which was considerably reinforced on the commencement of the war with Burma with the addition of 7 companies of 23 Bengal Native Infantry, the Dinajpur Local Infantry and the Champaran Light Infantry besides several detachments of irregulars. On the final settlement of the country, when there appeared to be no danger of immediate hostilities with Ava, and with only frontier forays of the wild tribes to guard against, the heavy expense of the Regiment caused the Government to reduce their strength. By an order of the 7 March, 1828, regular troops were withdrawn from Assam leaving the Rangpur Local Corps for the defence of the Province, augmented by the addition of two companies of Gurkhas.⁽¹⁾ The Rangpur Local Corps subsequently became the 'Assam Light Infantry' (A.L.I.) with a numerical strength of about 1,000 men in addition to a Brigade of Artillery. A permanent cantonment was made at Bishnath, 200 miles east of Gauhati, while two

(1) B.S.P.C. 7 Nov. 1828, No. 8.

companies of Assam Light Infantry were placed at Sadiya to guard the frontier with a couple of gunboats, each carrying a 12 pound cannonade and manned by native gollundaz. ⁽¹⁾

Local Militia - The immediate removal of the regular troops had been occasioned by reasons other than economic. The experiences of the late war made it obvious that the climate of the country was so inhospitable to the up-country natives, and so destructive to the commissariat cattle as to render successful operations extremely difficult against an enemy adept in jungle warfare and not subject to the same disadvantages. ⁽²⁾ Under these circumstances attempts were made from the very beginning to create a "native militia". If they were trained and disciplined, as Bedingfield observed in 1826, ⁽³⁾ "I see no reason why they should not be more than a match for any tribe they may be required to contend with." When such a proposal was presented by Scott in 1825 before the nobles at Rangpur, much enthusiasm was evinced by them, many boys belonging to the chief grandees were immediately brought forward for the purpose of being drilled as corps of cadets with the object of acting as officers in the militia. ⁽⁴⁾

Nothing, however, was done at Rangpur nor was the old

(1) Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of British India, pp. 71, 76-77.

(2) Butler, J. p. 12

(3) B.S.P.C. 21 July, 1826, No. 14; Bedingfield to Scott, 26 June, 1826.

(4) B.S.P.C. 21 July, 1826, No. 13.

militia of the Assam Government even improved. Nevertheless, the contingents supplied by the Moamarias and the Khamtis were armed and regularly trained under the officers of the regiment. This militia, numbering about 500,⁽¹⁾ was always at the command of the officer at Sadiya and on it fell mainly the duties of defending the frontier. "The role of the British party at Sadiya seems to have been to display the military might of the company by bluff rather than action."⁽²⁾ The latter was supplied by the unswerving allegiance of the auxiliaries who rallied round the banner of the British at any call of emergency.

In February, 1830, there was again some anxiety occasioned by the appearance of wakoom Khoomyan, a chief from the Hukawng Singphos, who had effected a junction with Lattora Gaum, with the obvious design of falling upon Beesa. It was also rumoured that Sadiya Khowa was in collusion with him. Captain Neufville hastened to Sadiya. In the engagement which followed at Lattoo, where the enemy was completely routed, nearly 1,000 men of the auxiliaries followed Neufville, who had only 40 men of his own.⁽³⁾ This wholehearted support coupled with the information that Lattora was the hereditary enemy of the Sadiya Khowa removed all suspicions of the conduct of the Khamti Chiefs; on the contrary, in appreciation of their services nearly a dozen of the Chiefs were rewarded with valuable presents of firearms.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of British India, pp. 76-7.

(2) Leach, E.R.; Cultural Change with special reference to the hill tribes of Assam, etc. page, 409

(3) B.P.C. 7 May, 1830, Nos. 46 and 48.

(4) B.P.C. 28 May, 1830, Nos. 74-75.

The policy towards the Singphos - its failure - Troubles on the New frontier were over. For the present, the Singphos were reduced to submission and many of them were settled in the Lowlands in the plains. Arrangements had also been made for future security and peace. It was not unreasonable to hope,

By slow prudent to mild

A rugged people, and through soft degree

Subdue them to the useful and the good.

There were however disappointments for reasons which are obvious. The interests of the Singphos remained opposed to those of the Government. They might have shown an inclination to abandon their old habits of lawlessness and rapine and turn their attention to peaceful agricultural ^{Pursuits.} But the surrender of their slaves left them entirely helpless. Without that prop their new possessions were as valueless as the barren hills. In short, the loss of slaves dealt a mortal blow to the Singpho economy.

The cultivation of the soil being incompatible with the past habits of the Singphos, an attempt was made to employ them by opening up commercial traffix^c with the frontier districts of Upper Burma. A market was established at Sadiya, where occasionally articles of foreign and Indian produce were supplied. The principal Singphos were allowed to take the

merchandise on credit for the first year, under engagement of repayment in the next. In 1830, a Commercial Agent was also appointed in the person of G.A. Bruce, the commander of the gunboats at Sadiya.⁽¹⁾ Extravagant hopes were entertained that this opening would provide the Singphos with a profitable occupation. Its prospects were, however, far from promising. The first consignment did not reach its destination, it was plundered, the guards being killed on the way.⁽²⁾ Investments were too small to make them profitable. Speculators neither ventured to take risks in a hostile country nor were they encouraged lest their greed for profit might defeat the political object. With the exception of a few chiefs - to whom goods supplied mainly as bribes - the frontier traffic proved to the bulk of the Singphos neither profitable nor a source of extensive employment. The enterprise became a losing concern and gradually dwindled¹ away with the opening of the experimental tea gardens in Upper Assam.⁽³⁾

Above all, the clannish rivalries of the Singphos were so deep-rooted and their internecine strife so acute, that permanent peace became impossible.

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- (1) B.B.P.C. 14 May, ¹⁸³⁰ Nos. 29-30; B.S.P.C. 14 July, 1830, No. 9.
 (2) B.S.P.S. 7 Sept., 1827, Nos. 17-19.
 (3) B.P.S. 19 June, 1837, No. 62. Towards the end of 1835, Bruce brought his account to a close with a loss of Rs. 803 - 13 as. He was subsequently appointed as the Superintendent of the Government Tea Gardens in Upper Assam.

It was, however, considered not important to appreciate the motives or the forces that were at work. "It would be of little consequence to us" as Captain Neufville once remarked "to analyse minutely the motives by which those seeking our alliance may be actuated provided we succeed in producing the desired effect by the general pacification of the frontier."⁽¹⁾ Experience, however, showed before long that the latter depended on the former: that Beesa Gaum and his satellites entered into the alliance with the British through fear of a power that was extending towards them no less than by "motives" of self interest, blood feud and personal vengeance, and that such "motives" had much to do with the tranquility of the frontier. The public recognition of Beesa as the "Paramount" chief over others - an outrage to the political sentiment of the Singphos- rendered impossible all Duffa's chances of recovery. His jealousy and hostility towards Beesa Gaum were intensified and he was driven to seek his future in the Hukawng whence he continued his marauding raids against his hereditary enemy.⁽²⁾ Thus was

(1) B.S.P.C. 20 May, 1825, No. 25.

(2) Hannay: Sketch of the Singphos or the Kakayen, Tract No. 266, page 46.

The consequence of such a mistaken policy was felt by Captain Hannay in 1839, when he observed: "We have not been successful in our management with the Singphos to our selection of the bad instrument the Beesa Gaum, an ambitious and intriguing man for the management of our intercourse with these people, as he only embroiled us in his own family quarrels, thus making enmity, when probably to this day the Singpho frontier might have been at peace, that every instance of disaffection or bad feeling which has been shown by the Singphos has been more or less mixed up with it."

the Government drawn into the vortex of Singpho politics and forced to engage in a number of profitless but harassing struggles which continued to disturb the tranquility of the ~~eastern frontier~~. New frontier.

CHAPTER THREE.

THE TRANSITION (1828-1832)

I. Insurrections and Rebellions.

In the early days of British occupation Scott was so busy with problems of internal administration, that he felt it impolitic to endanger the tranquility of the frontiers by abolishing the rights, conceded by the former Government to bordering hill-chiefs. He therefore recognised the jurisdiction of the Bhutan Government over the northern duars of Kamrup and Darrang, allowed the claims of blackmail to the Akas and the Duflas and tacitly conceded similar rights to the hill tribes in the North. (1) It was obviously a limited surrender of sovereignty; nevertheless, the recognition of the same rights by the first Commissioner of Assam amounted to their virtual confirmation, (2)

(1) Pemberton; Bootan, pp. 11-14.

(2) By a proceeding on 4 February 1825, Scott allowed the Bhuteas to collect from each house one Assamese Screen used in cooking out of doors, one bit of cloth, one handkerchief, one brass bracelet, a bundle of muga thread, some rice and paddy. By another proceeding on the next day, the Hazarikhwa Akas were allowed one portion of a female dress, a bundle of cotton thread and a cotton handkerchief. By the proceeding on 13 May, 1825, the Duflas were allowed to have from each 10 houses one double bit of cloth, one single, one handkerchief, one slave, 10 herd of horned cattle and 4 seers of salt (B.P.C. 20 Feb. 1834, No. 23). These terms and conditions varied with different chiefs from time to time. For further details vide I.P.C. 18 July, 1836, No. 76; B.R.C. 11 Aug., 1835, No. 5; Matthie to Robertson 10 Jan. '34.

any encroachment upon them hereafter was likely to be resented with a vengeance of the unsophisticated mountaineers.

Early relations with the Khasias - As early as 1824, Scott came in contact with the Khasias chiefs who held the duars in the South of Kamrup. On the conquest of Lower Assam, it had become necessary for political and strategic reasons to open up a line of communication through the hills⁽¹⁾ occupied by these chiefs. The project, however, did not materialize on the refusal of the Khasias and especially by the ruler of Khyrem and Moleem, to the route being made through his territory. For a time recourse was therefore taken to a more westerly route via Borduar. Fortunately, Chatter Sing, the Raja of Nungklow who held the lowlands of Borduar readily agreed and in face of the enmity of his neighbours, he rendered all possible assistance to the construction of the road.⁽²⁾

In 1826, Chatter Sing died. The opportunity was immediately taken by Scott to attach Borduar declaring that the duar would not be returned unless the Khasias were prepared to offer facilities for communications through the hills. In the meanwhile, a dispute over the succession arose between Rajan Sing and Terrut Sing, the son and the nephew of the late ruler. After the lapse of several months the contending parties, being unable to come to any final decision,

(1) B.S.P.C. 2 Mar. 1827, No. 20.

(2) B.S.P.C. 26 June, 1829, No. 2.

jointly invited Scott to effect a settlement. At a meeting attended by the chiefs of the several states with Scott, a decision was ultimately made in favour of Terrut Sing.⁽¹⁾

As the price of his mediation, Scott entered into an engagement in November 1826 with Terrut Sing, who agreed to come under the protection of the British Government, to support in construction of the road and to allow passage of troops through his territory.⁽²⁾

True to his engagement Terrut afforded all facilities for the construction of the road and maintained the most cordial relations with the Government for a year and a half.⁽³⁾ During that period as Pemberton reported "Bungalows had been constructed at Nungklow, a road had been cleared, an improved system of agriculture and gardening with many new vegetable products had been introduced and the most sanguine anticipation of the benevolent spirit which influenced every act of Scott's life appeared all realised." "On the 4th of April, 1829," he added "these bright prospects were obscured by an act of the most atrocious cruelty, which completely changed the character of the existing intercourse and converted the powerful friends of the Cassyas into formidable and irresistible enemies."⁽⁴⁾

(1) B.S.P.C. 26 June, 1828 No. 29; 2 Mar. 1827, No. 20.

(2) Aitchison, Treaties and Engagements, pp. 122-23.

(3) B.S.P.C. 13 Sept. 1827, No. 16; He was presented with an Assamese State Palanquin (Kekoradola), conveying a superior rank.

(4) B.S.P.C. 25 Apr. 1829, Nos. 9-10; Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of British India, page 223.

The unfortunate incident was the massacre at Nungklow of Lieuts. Bedingfield and Burlton together with a party of about fifty souls. The origin of the atrocity was traced by Pemberton to the speech of a Chaprasee, who had threatened the Khasias in a dispute, that they would be subjected by Scott to the same taxation as was levied on the inhabitants of the plains.⁽¹⁾ Scott also observed, "No provocation whatever was given to Terrut Sing or his followers by any of the gentlemen or people residing at Nungklow, but that they became the victims of this coldblooded and insensate murder for reasons which it is not easy to comprehend."⁽²⁾

It is rather difficult to believe, that the conflagration which had lasted with occasional breaks for several years could have originated in a single solitary cause, as conceived by Pemberton or that the Commissioner was entirely ignorant of the circumstances leading to the disaster. A critical study of the official correspondence and particularly of the depositions of the witnesses to the incident, reveals that the tragedy was the beginning of a struggle, in which forces had been at work for a long time in the affairs of these hill tribes.

Circumstances leading to the massacre - It appears, that although the Khasias occupied all the duars under the Ahom

(1) Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of British India. page 223.

(2) B.S.P.C. 26 June, 1829, No. 2.

(1)
Government, some of them lost their possessions at the beginning of the British rule on account of their conversion
(2)
to Hinduism, while others were deprived of their claims because of their connexion with the Burmese invaders. With the remainder, Scott entered into a settlement in 1825, for a fixed demand in
(3)
money. The assessments were light and occasionally remissions had been made; yet an assessment based on no correct data coupled with the difficulties of the currency, resulted in wholesale arrears. In consequence collectors were often changed
while ^{some} of the duars were attached outright. (4)
Apparently, within a few years of the introduction of British rule, the Khasias found that almost all the duars were lost to them. If the Singphos were crippled by the loss of their slaves, the Khasias

(1) B.P.C. 24 Nov. 1835, No. 17.

(2) According to the traditional custom of the Khasias, succession passes to the nephews of the sister's side, whereas in the case of a Hindu to the son of the deceased. Evidently, this conversion to Hinduism was detrimental to the interests of those families who were otherwise entitled to the inheritance. Thus the chiefs of Luki, Chaygaon, Boko and Bholagaon, on account of their conversion, were succeeded by their sons for several generations; the Khasia branch families thus deprived of their possessions were in the habit of committing depredations in the plains and occasionally took possession of the estates altogether, an instance of which occurred in 1823 in Luki duar (B.S.P.C. 25 Oct. 1826, No. 19).

(3) B.S.P.C. 5 Apr. 1825, Nos. 27-28.

(4) ¹⁸³⁶ B.P.C. 18 July, No. 87.

were equally hard hit by the loss of their duars for it deprived them of the main sources of their supplies. They were, however, not devoid of political sagacity nor incapable of combination. Independent in bearing, exclusive in spirit, jealous of their honour, and militant in action, the proud mountaineers felt British intervention in their affairs as an encroachment on their ancient rights and they determined to resist with a united front.

The initiative was taken by Barmanik, the ruler of Moleem. In August 1828, descending on the plains of Demorua, he carried away the collections made by the revenue officers, levied contributions of grain upon the people and publicly declared that he would occupy the lowlands in the ensuing cold season. Scott sent a strong note to the chief demanding heavy compensation, in default of which he was threatened with armed intervention.⁽¹⁾ As a result, the Khasias were thrown on the defensive. Barmanik took the lead in organising a coalition against the common enemy.⁽²⁾ Scott's ultimatum had served only to unite the Khasias in a war of liberation against the British Government.

At the same time, the relation with Terrut was far from friendly. He felt the utmost difficulty in discharging the

(1) B.S.P.C. 5 Sept., 1828, Nos. 11-12.

(2) Ibid.

amount of revenue, the payment of which he considered as a grievance. He interpreted the agreement with Scott as a sort of license - giving him unrestricted privileges over the lowlands. Here too, he was disappointed. Furthermore, when towards the close of 1828, he was threatened by the Chief of Ranee in retaliation for a previous atrocity, Scott had refused him military aid unless he was prepared to make reparations for his crime. To make matters worse, a few months later Terrut was about to fall upon Ranee, but his proceedings were ^{halted} by the presence of a British detachment from Gauhati. ⁽¹⁾ Terrut must now have felt that he was no longer bound by the treaty and therefore readily joined the coalition organised by Moleem.

The events of the Insurrection - The immediate objective of the insurgents seems to have been to assassinate the Commissioner himself and his agents, whom they considered mainly instrumental in depriving them of their possessions. Fortunately, just three days before the incident, Scott left for Cherrapunji and thereby escaped. Lieuts. Bedingfield and Burlton, who were then at Nungklow, for the recovery of their health fell at the hands of the assassins. With a force of 400 men Terrut hotly pursued Scott with the object of effecting a junction at Mamloo, near Cherra, with Makunda, ^{Sing,} the Raja of Mosmy so as

(1) B.S.P.C. 26 June, 1829, No. 3; B.P.C. 6 June, 1833, No. 109. Vide depositions of Mohadhar Barua on 17 May, 1829 and H.Hate, the interpreter on 15 Sept. 1829.

to prevent reinforcements from arriving from Sythet. In the meantime, to guard the passes from Assam, Barmanik and Mankowar, the son-in-law of Terrut hastened to the north. It was hoped, that before long, Scott's party would be mopped up and that the Khasias would then be able to descend in a body upon the plains.⁽¹⁾

Their programme was highly ambitious. Nothing short of the expulsion of the British was their ultimate aim, after the attainment of which their plans envisaged a political combination of the most extended nature. Messengers had been despatched to the frontier tribes and to Raja Chandra Kanta inviting all to join in a war of liberation;⁽²⁾ while on their

(1) B.S.P.C. 25 Apr. 1829, No. 13; 26 June, 1829, No. 2.

(2) B.S.P.C. 8 May, 1829, Nos. 9, 10, 12; vide depositions of Ramkanta and Chandra Deka: The former said that the following message was sent by Terrut Sing to the Raja: "The country of the Raja have taken possession by the English. We have been greatly annoyed. We have now killed the English gentlemen here, should the Raja now rise and assist us we can with the Garow people descend from the hills."

Actually, two messengers with letters to ex-Raja Chandra Kanta were captured by White. To counteract these designs, he immediately sent a Jamador with two sepoys to Kaliabor, where the Raja resided under the pretext of apprehending thieves.

(B.S.P.C. 1 May, 1829, No. 42).

part they endeavoured to prevent concerted movements of the British detachments by destroying bridges, erecting palisades and cutting off their supplies.

The massacre at Nungklow was the signal for a universal uprising in the hills. The situation in the north was equally disquieting; only a few months before, acts of aggression had been committed by the Bhutēas on the British subjects.⁽¹⁾ The Garos joining hands with the Khasias also assumed a threatening attitude along the whole of the Southern frontier. In fact, the situation had become so serious that Davidson, the officer in charge of Gawalpara had to call for reinforcements⁽²⁾ and White, who was on his way to Nungklow had to hasten back to Gauhati on the report of a gathering of Khasias near Beltola only seven miles from the town. The report, however, was found to be exaggerated through the fear of the Amlahs, who were always suspicious that the Assamese were in league with the rebels.⁽³⁾ Nevertheless, preliminary measures were taken by guarding the passes from the hills. A detachment was also sent to Gawalpara.⁽⁴⁾

The lack of adequate forces and the unsettled situation in the Bhutan frontier prevented White from a further advance

(1) Pemberton; Bhootan, page 15.

(2) B.S.P.C. 8 May, 1829, No. 11.

(3) B.S.P.C. 25 Apr. 1829, No. 10; Mr Severs to White 9 Apr. '29.

(4) B.S.P.C. 8 May, 1829, No. 11.

into the hills. Before long, it became absolutely certain that Scott's lines of communication with the South would also be completely cut off. However, the timely arrival of reinforcements under Lieut. Lister, who covered the distance by four marches in a single day, came as a relief and saved a critical situation. The advance of additional troops on the next day under Lieut. Egerton reversed the fortunes of the Khasias. Mamloo was set in flames and Terrut fled for his life. The chiefs of Lungbree, Myrong and Nokram in succession offered submission. The Raja of Cherra after wavering for a time came to terms; Kala Raja^{of Osimlee} and Singmanik of Khyrem followed suit. There was practically no opposition to the advancing parties who pushed their way with Scott and in early May reached Nungklow. Moleem also fell into their hands; it was left in charge of the Lingdoes, the priests of the village. A detachment of Assam Light Infantry was quartered at Myrong under Lieut. Vetch and another at Nungklow under Mirza Bandula, the Superintendent of the Garo hills.⁽¹⁾

Uprising of the Ramrye Chiefs - In June 1829, trouble broke out again in the West. The Ramrye chiefs who held the duars of Pantan, Bogy and Bongaon rose up in arms and killed 14 porters, who were carrying supplies to Nungklow. Vetch lost no time in in sending a party of Sepoys who succeeded in reducing Zuber Sing, the principal chief of Ramrye. He came to terms and in fact

(1) B.S.P.&. 5 June, 1829, No. 6.

he was averse to hostilities; the pressure of his neighbours, in particular of his rival Lalchand had constrained him to resort to arms.⁽¹⁾ His ready submission cost him his life.

Barely a year later, the murderer of Zuber, Lalchand made another inroad into the duars, killed the officer in charge and destroyed their quarters. No damage whatever was done to the inhabitants, which made it obvious that their animosity was only against the British authority, which they wanted to oust from their possessions.⁽²⁾

Tendrong, Soparpunji and Bairampunji - In the meantime Lieut. Lister left for Sylhet, leaving a strong party at Moleem to prevent further machinations of Barmanik in that quarter. He confronted on his way a strong confederacy of the Khasias at a place called Tendrong. About the same time, the inhabitants of Soparpunji and Bairampunji, who had long been quiet, committed acts of aggression in the neighbourhood of Pandua and Mosmy.⁽³⁾ Despite showers of stones and arrows, with a mere handful of men, Lister drove the Khasias from post to post, stormed their entrenchments, penetrated into their caves and mountain fastnesses and so completely destroyed the confidence in their own powers that they confined themselves hereafter to

(1) B.S.P.C. 14 Aug. 1829, No. 11; 28 Aug. 1829, No. 21.

(2) B.P.C. 11 Feb., 1831, Nos. 27-28.

(3) B.S.P.C. 11 Sept., 1829, No. 9; 18 Sept. 1829, No. 1; 23 Oct., 1829, Nos. 14-15.

attacks upon small parties, for whom they lay in ambush, and rarely ventured to contend openly with any detachment, however inferior to them in numbers.

Nevertheless, the desultory war continued. The Khasias failed and failed utterly in their objectives. There remained however the fact, that they were the vanguards in a war of liberation in which they had every reason to count on the wholehearted support of the people of the plains, with whom they had had frequent and intimate contact from ages past.

Revolt of Gomdhar Kowar (1828) - There was thus, extremely fertile soil for the dissemination of revolt again the British authority in Assam. The nobles and the princes of the blood royal naturally looked with favour on any schemes calculated to restore the ancient régime, for only through such an event could they hope for a return of their former influence and authority. Repeated attempts had in fact been made in Upper Assam to establish a puppet monarchy. Towards the close of 1828, Gomdhar Kowar, a scion of the Ahom royal family, was actually proclaimed king by a group of discontented nobles in the South-west corner of Joshat.⁽¹⁾ It was alleged, that the idea of royalty was awakened in the mind of Gomdhar by the occurrence of certain phenomena. Considering them to be omens of high fortune, coming as they did at the moment when

(1) B.S.P.C. 4 Dec. 1828, No. 10; B.P.C. 12 Mar. 1830, No. 4B; Neufville to Scott 14 Dec. 1828.

the restoration of a native prince was under consideration, the credulous prince ventured to assert his own claim. At the beginning, the Kowar desired to appear as a suitor and was actually on his way to the authorities at Jorhat. ⁽¹⁾ He was, however, persuaded by his supporters to retrace his steps and was subsequently installed as king with due formality. His collaborators were under the impression that after the withdrawal of regular troops from Upper Assam, it might not be difficult on their part to occupy Rangpur, the former capital of the Ahoms, by expelling ⁽²⁾ the few war-broken soldiers that might be left there on guard. They had also high hopes, not without reason, of the co-operation of all the ex-nobles in a project, that would retrieve their fortunes. Brisk preparations were therefore made for the eventual march to Rangpur by recruiting men, collecting arms and ⁽³⁾ levying contributions.

The news spread like wild-fire. Neufville, who was absent at Sadiya arrived in time and immediately despatched a party of havildars followed by another under ^{Lieut.} Rutherford. No resistance, however, was offered by the rebels, and most of them were arrested ⁽⁴⁾ including the Kowar and his family. Some secret correspondence was discovered at the spot, which proved beyond doubt the complicity

(1) B.P.C. 12 Mar. 1830, No. 14; vide deposition of Dhanudhar.

(2) Ibid; vide deposition of Gaurig Namrupia Khal.

(3) B.P.C. 12 Mar, 1830, No. 17; Vide depositions of Jaalak and Subadar Baidyanath.

(4) B.P.C. 12 Mar., 1830, Nos. 4B and 12.

of a number of former officials mainly Dhanjay, the ex-Borgo-
 hain.⁽¹⁾ The Kowar was tried and sentenced to death by the
 Sadr Panchayet; it was, however, commuted ~~for~~⁽²⁾ an imprisonment
 of 14 years.

The Conspiracy of the Nobles (1830) - It appears, that Gomdhar
 might have had the ambition of a petty chief and had never
 intended to take up arms.⁽³⁾ He was goaded into action by his
 accomplices and in fact, he had been a tool in the hands of
 the designing nobles who exploited his mental delusions to their
 own advantage. Their spirits instead of being damped by the
 failure of Gomdhar, were emboldened to renew their attempts
 with vigour. Dhanjay, who was kept confined for trial contrived
 to escape from jail and made preparations for a rising on a
 grand scale. Emissaries were secretly sent out with letters
 to the chiefs of the Moamarias, Khamtis, Nagas, Singphos, Khasias
 and Garos calling upon their aid in overthrowing the British

(1) B.P.C. 12 Mar. 1830, No. 13C.

(2) B.P.C. 12 Mar. 1830, Nos. 15, 17-18, 34.

(3) In a letter to the Political Agent, just on the even of his
 arrest, the Kowar expressed his ambition in the following
 manner: "The substance of my desire being that I may
 be allowed to collect all the revenue of the country myself.
 I have no wish to war the company but to receive the country
 as Raja from their hands and I will do what the Company
 wish."
 (B.P.C. 12 Mar., 1830, No. 12. vide letter C.)

(1) régime. The conspiracy was at first confined to Mittoek and engineered by the ex-Borgohain with his two sons and son-in-law - Hemakanta, Haranath and Jeuram. Soon, Peali Barphukan, the son of the ex-viceroy of Lower Assam, Rupchand Kowar, Boom Singpho and many others joined hands, and by the beginning of 1830 a flare-up was imminent at any moment in the North-east corner of Assam. (2)

The conspiracy, however, failed. It was betrayed by the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, who handed over the letter that was addressed to him to Neufville. (3) Nevertheless, towards the close of March 1830, the rebels made a desperate dash at the fort of Rangpur, only to be repulsed and quickly followed up by a party of sepoy who succeeded in seizing most of the insurgents. On this occasion too, Dhanjay and his son Hemakanta escaped and disappeared in the jungles of the Naga Hills. (4) To prevent similar attempts in future, exemplary punishments were meted out to Peali and Jeuram, who were sentenced to death, while the rest were given long term imprisonments with confiscation of property. (5)

(1) B.P.C. 24 June, 1834, No. 84; Neufville to Scott, Jan. 1, '29.

(2) B.P.C. 24 Sept. 1830, No. 76; Neufville to Scott, 14 June, '30.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Despite a reward of Rs. 500 awarded for their seizure, they escaped the notice of the police officers until March, 1830, when they were arrested and handed over by Raja Purandar Singha. However, with the restoration of peace in the country, it was considered unnecessary to hold a fresh trial and consequently they were released.

(B.P.C. 24 June, 1834, Nos. 84-85.

(5) B.P.C. 24 Sept. 1830, No. 76; Proceedings of the Criminal Court of the Agent. 6 Aug. 1830.

It is remarkable that the people as a whole were not disaffected. They showed no sympathy for the conspirators but rather a feeling of distrust,⁽¹⁾ with the memories of the anarchical conditions under the former Government still fresh in their minds. The rebels were also disappointed from the very beginning of a concerted action even from their own order and in fact, the loyalty of a section of them to the Government helped to foil their projects. Nevertheless, the attempts "though chimerical in design and shortlived" as Scott observed "(the) consequences created a most pernicious effect in unsettling the minds of the natives throughout Assam and tending much to throw them back into that state of anarchy and confusion from which we have so lately relieved them."⁽²⁾

II. Administrative Confusion.

The failure of Scott's System - (a) Upper Assam: The insurrectionary movements were the outcome of a reaction against the official aristocracy. Scott's policy of conciliating the higher orders proved a dismal failure. To the great disappointment of the Commissioner it was found before long that

- (1) It is interesting to note that while almost all the supporters of the Kowar were Baruas, Phukens, Gohains they were conspicuous by their absence against Peali and others. When Gomdhar disclosed himself as a Raja before the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, they refused to accept him as such and later of course agreed, only on a promise that he would not exact any revenue, grant more land and remove their difficulties. in the list of those who deposed

- (2) B.P.C. 12 Mar. 1830, No. 12.

the men of rank who were entrusted with most of the revenue and judicial business in Upper Assam, proved utterly inefficient and in fact, their presence caused great labour and trouble to the European functionaries. ⁽¹⁾ "Owing to the indolent and incapable conduct of the nobility" Scott reported "the impossibility of extracting money from their hands without the use of duress, the money collected on account of the State Captain Neufville was compelled with every inclination to keep that class in office to have recourse to the agency of Tahseeldars, generally speaking to that of Bengal or to relinquish all hope of realising Government dues." ⁽²⁾ For the general improvement of the administration of justice and police it was now considered highly necessary to employ in lieu of the nobles "men of real ability and business of inferior rank." ⁽³⁾ To the detriment of the higher order such measures might have advanced to a limited extent the cause of the lower classes and of the Government. There was no disguising the fact, however, that the intrusion of the new element into the affairs of the State was productive of a gradual distrust and discontent of the nobility. It was therefore only natural, that they should have only blessed if not actually aided the insurgents and would perhaps have joined them at the first dawn

(1) B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 50.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

of success.

It was true that arrears had been accumulated and there were also a few cases of embezzlement and of extortion.⁽¹⁾ Likewise the strictness of the British rule may have proved incompatible with the simple habits of the Ahom nobility. It must, however, be realised that they were now placed in a system to which they had been strangers. The business of the State had previously been conducted almost entirely without the use of written documents. In fact, the use of writing was little known to the public functionaries; few of them had any accounts to keep or money payments to make. It was therefore not surprising that they should be amazed at the mass of writing in which they saw the most insignificant transactions of the Government conducted and that they inevitably proved incompetent to furnish the voluminous and minute accounts required of them.⁽²⁾

Apart from the new system they had to confront a new situation. The rebels were now scattered over the whole of Upper Assam - some on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, some on the south; some on the Dikhow and some on the Dhansiri -⁽³⁾

(1) B.S.P.C. 18 Nov. 1825, No. 8; 30 May, 1829, No. 9.

(2) On one occasion when the ex-Raja Purandar Sing complained to Scott of the existing system of taking written depositions in ordinary cases, the latter with humour replied: "Swurgo Deo (the usual address of the Ahom kings, implying the Lord of Heaven) you are of celestial origin and can recollect everything. We are earth-born, and when we go to dinner forget what we have heard in the course of the day, therefore we write down what we hear." (White, Memoir to Scott, pages 57-59).

(3) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 87.

so that it was impossible for them to look to the interests of all the ryots. To effect speedy collection of revenue it had become necessary to appoint a host of petty officials, whose only object was to fleece the ryots down to their last farthing. Consequently, there was extortion and oppression and also in places (mainly on the north bank) wholesale emigration to the territory of the Muttocks where taxation was only nominal.⁽¹⁾

To remedy these abuses attempts had been made by Neufville to carry out a fresh enumeration of Pykes.⁽²⁾ He introduced a partial settlement in certain areas, although the assessment was extremely unequal.⁽³⁾ To counteract emigration he also imposed a tribute on the immigrants in Muttock.⁽⁴⁾ But want of adequate and efficient supervision inconsistent with his extensive jurisdiction prevented him from eradicating actual evils. The establishment of the "Surasuree Courts" might have effectively⁽⁵⁾

(1) B.P.C. 13 Apr. 1835, No. 4; Scott to Neufville 22 Jan. 1829.

(2) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 87.

(3) Thus in Bassa and Dayang, in the South-west, where lands were extremely fertile, the same rate prevailed as in the areas on the North bank of the Brahmaputra where cultivation was not even half of the aforesaid districts.

(4) Aitchison, Treaties and Engagements, page 142.

(5) These courts were set up in Upper Assam to check the corruption of the revenue officials. Vide ante p. 20

checked the rapacity of the revenue officials provided they had been backed by a vigilant police. Neufville himself admitted "the introduction of a perfect and even tolerably efficient police establishment in a country like Assam is altogether out of our power within my reasonable charge and for a considerable period at least its effective operation must be confined to a certain distance round the Suddar Station."⁽¹⁾ Consequently, corruption continued to be rife among the rank and file of the Amlahs and the interests of the ryots were left entirely unprotected.

(b) Central Assam - The same tale of administrative anarchy and reaction against the official aristocracy was heard in other divisions of the Province.

In Darrang, Scott entered into a settlement in 1824 with Raja Bijaynarayan for Rs. 32,000 in addition to 8000 maunds of rice.⁽²⁾ In two years after a 'peal' (measurement) being made, the revenue was raised to Rs. 54,000. With the utmost difficulty he cleared off his dues for 1826-7, but protested vigorously against the inaccuracies of the measurement. The Settlement was continued for the subsequent year with a reduction of Rs. 3,000. Still the Raja failed to pay his revenue in 1827-8 and his property was confiscated.⁽³⁾ Then this district was placed in charge of a Tahseeldar with authority to collect 'Barangani' to cover the expenses of the establishment. Since then the entire business was in a state of confusion. Petty officials in the shape of 'kuruk sezvals' backed by police were sent out for the collection of arrears. The police, sezvals and Tahseeldars all being

(1) B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 58.

(2) The Raja paid a tribute of Rs. 10,000 to the Ahom Government and later Rs. 15,000 to the Burmese during the period of their occupation in Assam. There is a little discrepancy as to the Settlement with the British Government in 1824-5. According to Matthie it was fixed at Rs. 32,000 with 8000 mds. of rice, whereas Scott reported the amount as Rs. 42,000 besides the service of 1500 pykeas.

(3) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 83; Rutherford to Robertson 18 Jan. '33.

paid by 'Barangani' took their pay monthly from the collections while the actual demand of the Government accumulated in arrears. (1)

Similarly, in Nowgong and Raha a gross measurement (Dhalla Peal) was made by Aradhan Roy, who was in charge of the district. Since the measurement was found to be erroneous, it was repeated twice after 1828 and the expense of both had to be borne by the ryots. They were also required to pay the charges for the Tahseeldars' establishment as well as compensation to the mufasil officers for the loss of commission arising out of arrears. (2) In 1831, the whole of these extra cesses were consolidated into a charge of six to eight annas in the rupee in addition to the tax which could not be realised. In 1832 (3) a gang of sezvals were distributed, which completed the ruin. The resources of the ryots were drained away and they had no other alternative but to flee from the district.

Thus, trouble arose in different areas of central Assam out of over-assessment. Settlements were made without due consideration of the resources and capabilities of the ryots. In Darrang the evil was aggravated by an abrupt change from taking the revenue in kind to an exaction in money when no trade as yet existed by which the ryots could readily dispose of their products. No remissions were granted, on the contrary extra cesses were levied for a variety of purposes when even the stipulated revenue could not be collected. No abatement was

(1) Ibid.

(2) B.P.C. 6 June, 1833. No. 106.

(3) Ibid.

ever made in the Government demand when lands became waste through the immigration of the inhabitants. Hence the basis on which the revenue was formed soon became entirely fictitious. In consequence as Rutherford, the officer in charge of Darrang reported "dreadful extortion which had haggard the ryot and rendered a large portion of the country waste, in which up to our conquest such a thing as jungle was hardly to be seen." (1)

(c) Lower Assam - In Lower Assam the condition was in the words of Robertson "melancholy to the extreme." (2) Tracts of territories had been entrusted to a single person - the Choudhury, by a method which was more of the nature of "a sale by auction" than anything else. The parganas and the Taluks had been let out for a specific sum without any reference to the resources of the country and not infrequently to individuals of questionable character. No effective steps were taken to protect the ryots from the unjust demands nor was any accurate account taken and receipts to the ryots were practically unknown. (3)

Uniformity was nowhere to be found in the mode of collection. "In but one instance" Captain Bogle, the officer in charge of six parganas remarked "do I find that the system actually in force corresponds to that set forth in collection

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833. No. 83.

(2) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 84.

(3) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833^{no 92;} A Bogle to Robertson 25 Feb. '33.

papers there has long been one assessment in the office and another in the Pargana, each Choudhury has gone on a plan of his own, every domain is assessed in a different manner and the greatest confusion exists throughout the whole." ⁽¹⁾ Apart from this diversity, it was a common feature as in Upper Assam to find Taluks of one pargana in the centre of another or removed several parganas off. ⁽²⁾ However generous and well intentioned a choudhury might be, it was vain to expect him to do full justice to the scattered ryots under his control.

The revenue consisted mainly of 'Gadhan', 'Jammadhan' and 'Kharikatana'. In addition the ryots had to pay a certain amount in every rupee for mufasil expenses, on account of profit and loss for exchange (Multana) in Narayani rupee besides the 'Barangani'; ⁽³⁾ the latter was invented by Scott as "a sort of panacea" for all the evils arising from oppression and exaction; instead of being a remedy, it only increased the mischief. "Even persons of intelligence would be puzzled to say how much a ryot would have to pay to the Government. To the unfortunate peasantry the account must have been wholly incomprehensible. To imagine that the native collectors could not avail themselves of the openings which such a mode of collection affords to exaction added to the confusion arising from the demand being paid in an inferior commission

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 89; Bogle to Robertson 10 Feb., '33.

(2) Ibid.

(3) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 93.

of capricious value, is to expect too much from human character." (1)

In 1833, the disastrous consequence of the existing evils was summarised by Bogle in the following manner: "The system hitherto followed and still in great measure in force has been harmful in the extreme. That its direct tendency has been to reduce the ryots to a state of poverty and dejection of the most distressing nature, to cause a general decrease in population, to impede cultivation, to ruin those resources from which the Government might somehow have derived a handsome revenue, to create constant distrust and anxiety in the minds of the people, to eradicate every feeling of gratitude towards their rulers and to enrich a few worthless beings at the expense of the whole population of the country." (2) He also reported that, "Many of the finest parts of the country are now a dreary waste, villages once the most flourishing are now deserted and in the ruins, the inhabitants instead of finding in the British Government a power which would protect them with enjoyment of their hearths and homes have fled by hundred in all directions, not only to the neighbouring zamindaris of Bengal but what is more painful to contemplate to the lawless regions of Bhootan." (3)

"To a few choudhuris alone" he added, "has the present

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 89; Bogle to Robertson, 10 Feb. '33.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

system been advantageous, armed as they have been with the most extensive judicial authority on the one hand with most loosely defined fiscal powers on the other, it ought not to excite wonder that the people who had been placed completely at their mercy should have suffered severely." (1)

It was not the choudhuris alone, but the mode of assessment and mainly the corruption of the Amlahs that were responsible for the evils enumerated above. In fact, the fortunes of a choudhury had always been hanging in the balance. To obtain his post he had to fill the pockets of the petty officials at the court. If installed he was required to furnish a security and also to pay half a year's revenue into the treasury before he had collected any. To meet these immediate demands he had to borrow at ruinous interests - varying from 50 to 120 per cent per annum, and exactions therefore became a necessity. Complaints against the choudhuris were general. To prevent ruin they had to keep the persons at the helm of affairs in good humour by bribery. Despite so many odds if a choudhury could pay up his dues he might be re-appointed; in default he suffered prosecution and the distraint of his tangible property. Yet the mere name of choudhury was so valuable in the eyes of the people that there was no dearth of applicants for his office, even when the field

(1) Ibid.

of extortion was somewhat barren." (1) If one choudhury were broken and another appointed, the successor followed the same path (2) and invariably shared the same fate. Feeling their position always insecure, the 'publicani' in Assam had obviously no other alternative but to squeeze the ryots as best they could.

Was there no court of justice to redress the grievances of the people? Justice there was, but at a price that was not worth while. In criminal cases the verdict given by the native panchayets under the immediate eye of a European officer were on the whole satisfactory and met the ends of justice. (3) But in civil business in the first instance, being left entirely to the native tribunals, subject only to the remote supervision of a superior authority resulted in hopeless failure. (4) Even the Sadr Panchayets

(1) Ibid; the inordinate appetite for office, to grasp at power on any terms and the pernicious influence of the Amlah will be evident from the following; In the Pargana of Barbhag a choudhury died in 1831, leaving arrears of Rs. 5810. In his eagerness to obtain charge, another choudhury undertook to discharge the whole sum, although he had the knowledge that it was impossible on his part to fulfil the engagement. He was soon superseded by a sezwal. Out of the Rs.1711 which he had remitted, it was found that an amount of Rs. 1217 was intercepted and appropriated by the Treasurer of the collectors' office for the service rendered by him at the time of the choudhury's appointment. (B.P.C. 24 Sept. 1833, No. 13)

(2) P.L.J.B. 16 Jan. 1834, No. 2.

(3) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 93.

(4) B.P.C. 6 June, 1833, No. 106.

were reported to be venal in the extreme while the mufasil ones were mere engines of extortion. In fact, the courts and the Panchayets at Gauhati were held in such distrust and detestation by the people that they would prefer to submit to almost anything rather than seek redress there, for it was not uncommon that the presenting of a complaint was more injurious than putting up with the original case. ⁽¹⁾

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 89; Bogle to Robertson, 10 Feb. '33.

CHAPTER FOUR.

REFORM REORGANISATION AND THE RESTORATION OF AHOM MONARCHY (1832-33)

I. Revenue Reforms.

"It unfortunately appears certain, from whatever cause we have hitherto governed Assam extremely ill the country has been retrograding, its inhabitants emigrating, its villages decaying and its revenue annually declining, although in natural advantages Assam is stated to be far superior to Arracan, which since it has been subject to our rule is said to have been advanced in prosperity."

So ran a despatch from the Court of Directors on 3 December, 1834.⁽¹⁾ The harrowing tales of the affairs of the Province moved the authorities in England. Expressing their utmost regret the Court disapproved the action of the Government of India⁽²⁾ and enjoined upon the Governor General to lose no time in framing a plan of administration comprising all the securities for integrity and efficiency in the subordinate agents of the Government.

Measures by Scott - In the meantime, however, attempts had been made to reform the existing abuses. Throughout the 26 parganas of Kamrup Scott made it a rule that the choudhuris should be elected

(1) C.D. 3 Dec. 1834, No. 14, para 8.

(2) Ibid. para 52.

(1) by the people, while in Darrang to constitute a panchayet he went so far as to introduce the system of universal suffrage and vote by ballot. (2) He exercised a vigorous system of espionage over the Amlahs and at the same time encouraged the police officers, in particular, to take the customary bribes provided they reported the fact to the magistrate. If anyone was convicted of offering a bribe or receiving one without reporting it, the informer received the whole or part according to circumstances. (3) Being fully conscious that scarcity of currency was one of the main causes of the misery of the ryots, Scott persistently urged upon the Government the necessity of inviting foreign capitalists to the province and of encouraging the production of costly but exportable articles. He offered every facility for the production of silk, brought workmen from Rangpur to teach the people the improved mode of preparing and spinning 'muga silk' and established several silk-worm firms at Desh Darrang and Nowgong. He also made strenuous efforts to increase the buying capacity of the ryots and at some pecuniary sacrifices to himself sought to improve the implements and general system of cultivation in all its branches. (4)

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 93; White, Memoir of David Scott, p. 22.

(2) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 89; Roobakari, 14 Oct. 1828.

(3) B.P.C. 23 July, 1832, No. 70; Private letter White to the Agent.

(4) B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 50; 7 May, 1830, No. 51; White, Memoir of David Scott, pp. 25-26.

Causes of Scott's failure - Although, with the best of intentions every endeavour was thus made at reform, Scott's measures were only palliatives. By giving the people a share in their own administration he hoped to check effectively the improper influence of the subordinate officials and the Amlahs. The system, however, did not succeed. To secure temporary relief the ryots elected simple-minded persons who never troubled themselves concerning the revenue; in consequence the district fell into arrears. They were invariably led by factious demagogues, "who induced them to elect very improper persons and occasionally some powerful man in the district pinned up some 200 or 300 freeholders until they agreed to vote for him and marched them up in triumph to the place of election."⁽¹⁾ In spite of his strict vigilance corruption continued to be rife in the rank and file of the Amlahs, while the indifference of the Government left the laudable projects of Scott in cold storage, for many years to come.

Too late, Scott realised the fact, that the Khelwari system had become an anachronism. Not only had it become out of date but in the absence of proper supervision its entire personnel had become corrupt and hopelessly inefficient. To discharge the duties of civil and criminal justice, revenue

(1) White, Memoir of David Scott, pp. 22-23.

settlements and political relations with the whole of the extensive frontier, ⁽¹⁾ he had the assistance of only two officers - Captains White and Neufville, the latter was also the political Agent in Upper Assam. In May 1830, Lieut. Rutherford ⁽²⁾ was placed under Neufville to aid him in his civil duties. But Neufville's death in the following month ⁽³⁾ removed the only man in whom Scott reposed implicit confidence. In spite of that, Scott felt the existing state of revenue in Assam did not justify the employment of additional officers and he hesitated to urge the Government to increase the European establishment. Doubtless Scott attempted, as Robertson later observed "more than he was equal to perform and that it is to be lamented as much on the Government's account as his own that he allowed his desire of sparing expense to become so paramount in his mind as to deter him from pressing for the assistance which he himself considered necessary." ⁽⁴⁾

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- (1) He had a) political duties of the N.E. frontier including the management of the Khasia hills, revision of the proceedings of the officers in Upper Assam, Cachar and the collection of revenue from some of the northern mahals; b) Revenue transactions concerning the whole jurisdiction including the trials of 'Hal Abadilands' in Sythet. c) Judicial business - both civil and criminal from Upper and Lower Assam including the revision of trials in cases of life and death, hearing of appeals from the decisions of civil panchayets in Lower Assam and from those of the political Agent in Upper Assam; besides similar judicial duties in Sythet and Gowalpara. B.P.C. 23 July, 1832, No. 70.
- (2) B.P.C. 28 May, 1830, No. 83.
- (3) B.P.C. 26 Aug. 1830, No. 62.
- (4) B.P.C. 23 July, 1832, No. 70.

Scott's death - Under the heavy pressure of work his health completely broke down. Since September 1829 he had been suffering considerably from ossification of the heart.⁽¹⁾ Still his application to business never relaxed; he generally commenced hearing petitions at daybreak and often continued at work till it was dark. "This incessant labour," White tells us,⁽²⁾ "accelerated the progress of the malady". In fact, for the last thirteen months of his life he had to lie prostrate at Cherrapunji, where he passed away on 20 August, 1831, at the age of forty-five.⁽³⁾

The premature death of such a distinguished officer was undoubtedly a serious loss to the Government and a misfortune for the people entrusted to his care. He may not have possessed administrative ability of the highest order, but he evinced a vigour and a power of understanding that were exceptional. He had had his failures, but he was resourceful and had the sagacity to learn from his mistakes. After all, the task he had to face was extremely formidable. He steered Assam through one of the most chaotic periods of her history and earned the gratitude of posterity as her saviour from

(1) White, Memoir of David Scott, Appendix, p. 78.

(2) White, Memoir of David Scott, p. 59.

(3) B.P.C. 2 Sept. 1831, Nos. 125-6.

Burmese domination. He was indeed the patriarch of the Assamese. With a high moral character and an unparalleled sense of duty he devoted all his exertions to their all-round improvement. "His memory is still held in very high esteem among the inhabitants In fact, no Assamese could have more efficiently championed the cause of his country than did Scott."⁽¹⁾

Revenue reforms in Lower Assam - In September 1831, Mr. Cracroft temporarily succeeded in the office of Agent to the Governor General. In the meantime, Lieut. Matthie relieved White, who was then directed to assume the charge of the Political Agent in Upper Assam.⁽²⁾

In early 1832, in order to institute an enquiry into the revenue affairs Lieut. Rutherford was ordered to proceed to Darrang and on a similar duty, Lieut. Bogle was deputed^{later} to the six parganas in the west of Kamrup.⁽³⁾ After making extensive tours in their respective districts, they made a thorough investigation of the causes of the existing evils and revealed facts which were quite disappointing. In spite of the huge arrears, it was reported by Rutherford "that there is no revenue due from the ryot as the whole has been collected by the Hazarees, Saikias and Boras!"⁽⁴⁾

(1) Bhuyan, S.K., East India Company's Relations with Assam, 1771-1826, p. 807

(2) B.P.C. 2 Sept. 1831, No. 126; 5 Aug. 1831, Nos. 19-20.

(3) F.N. No. 17, B.P.C. 9 Apr. 1832, nos 65-66; 2 July, nos 100-1.

(4) B.P.C. 6 June, 1833, No. 106.

In a similar strain, Bogle observed "It should be borne in mind that the country requires fostering, that the people have hitherto been sadly oppressed and to the best of my belief have not now the means of paying more, without inconvenience."⁽¹⁾

To rehabilitate the country, they felt convinced that encouragement must be held out for the return of the fugitive ryots by allowing them to reoccupy their own lands or to occupy new lands rent free for a certain period and afterwards to subject them to a moderate assessment.⁽²⁾ For the future they proposed to form settlements for a period of years, to break up the larger and scattered parganas into smaller and more convenient divisions, for which engagements were to be taken separately from respectable men residing or possessing influence in the locality. They were to institute every enquiry which was immediately practicable for the proper determination of the amount of the assessment, and also to endeavour to render the system more simple and certain by consolidating all separate claims upon the ryots into one single Government demand.⁽³⁾

Introduction of Land Tax - In November 1832, the Khelwari

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 92; Bogle to Robertson.

(2) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833 No. 93; 6 June, No. 106.

(3) Ibid.; also P.L.I.B. 16 Jan. 1834, No. 2.

system was abolished in Darrang and some areas of Kamrup and

(1) two years later in Nowgong. The taxation was now reduced to an

(2) assessment in land and a capitation tax. The tax on land stood

as follows:-

	<u>Kamrup</u>	<u>Darrang</u>	<u>Nowgong</u>
Land per pura 1st class (Rupit)	1-0	1-8	1-0
" 2nd class (Bowtalli)	0-10 ²	0-12	0-8
" 3rd class (Faringati)	0-6	0-4

(3) As a security against extortion, every revenue officer was hereafter required to submit the following returns (a) abstract statement showing the total quantity of land and the number of hearths and homes, as the case might be, in the village; (b) detailed statement showing the quality and quantity of land cultivated by and the name of each ryot (c) showing the name and number of hearths and homes. After a thorough scrutiny, these (4) statements formed the basis upon which settlements were formed.

(1) B.R.C. 1 Mar. 1836, No. 40; Report of the Revenue and Judicial Administration, Assam, 1835.

(2) In Kamrup 'Kharikatana' was calculated at four rates, from Rs. 3-12 to 12 as; 'Hearth Tax' was collected in Darrang from Re.1 to 8 as, while in Nowgong a 'poll tax' on all the ryots - high and low, - was levied at the rate of Re.1/- per head.

(3) He was called a 'Chaudhury' in Kamrup, 'Patgiri' in Darrang and 'Dishay' in Nowgong.

(4) Report of Revenue and Judicial Administration, Assam, 1835. vide the reports of Matthie and Bogle.

The revenue being ascertained, 'Pattas' were issued - specifying therein the amount to be paid by each ryot under the seal and signature of the collector. Revenue officers were prohibited on pain of a heavy fine and dismissal from realising any more than was noted against a ryot's name.

Copies of these records were also kept at the collector's office for reference in case of complaint of extortion or otherwise. ⁽¹⁾

In consequence of the reorganization of the revenue units a large number of former officials was now thrown out of employment, ⁽²⁾ and having no other source of income, they were reduced to abject poverty. Although the amount of taxation was lowered, it was nowhere uniform. The house, hearth and poll taxes which were still maintained were unfair since they made no distinction between rich and poor, while the invidious distinctions of the former age continued by taxing according to caste or culling. ⁽³⁾ Nevertheless, the results of the new measures were promising. In early 1834, Captain Bogle made another tour in the six parganas and to his satisfaction he found that many of the ryots who had deserted had returned to their villages and the country was gradually assuming its former appearance. ⁽⁴⁾ Every precaution

(1) Ibid.

(2) B.G. File No. 637; Assessment of the six parganas, 1839-40; Jenkins to Sadr Board 8 Oct. 1839.

(3) Thus oilmen of Ramdeah (in Kamrup) had to pay a tax of Rs.3/- per head and the silk weavers of Snalkuchi also (in Kamrup) also paid a tax on their profession @ Rs. 2/-; In Nowgong the fishermen (Domos) and sweepers (Haris) were taxed @ Re.1/-, while on the Brassworkers (Marias) it was levied @ Rs.5/- per head.

(4) B.R.C. 21 July, 1834; Nos. 6-7.

was now observed to frustrate extortion defining the demand not only upon every village or mouza but on every ryot. He was no longer harassed for any additional taxes to meet mufasil police and other miscellaneous charges. The conduct of the subordinate officers was also subjected before long, to a more extensive European supervision which combined with the revised revenue system provided a greater security to the well-being of the ryots.

II. Administrative Reorganisation.

Thomas Campbell Robertson - In April 1832, Mr. Robertson assumed charge of the office of the Governor General's Agent on the North East frontier and the Commissioner for Assam. ⁽¹⁾ A man of untiring zeal, approved talents and high moral character, he had begun his career in 1806 and had served as an assistant to the Register to the Sadr Dewani Adawlat (1809), Register of several zilla courts (1810-11), collector of Behar (1811-14), Judge and Magistrate of Patna (1815-20) and of Cawnpur (1820-25). He was appointed in 1825, the Agent and Civil Commissioner of Arakan and in the same year he assisted in the peace negotiations with the Ava. ⁽²⁾ In the management of civil and political functions and mainly in conducting the transaction with the Burmese, Robertson distinguished himself by his marked prudence, judgment and discretion.

(1) B.P.C. 28 Oct. Nos. 5-7. ^{7 May 1832, No. 26}

(2) Personal Records vol. 18; Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography* h. 362

Corroborating the statement of the local authorities, he did not hesitate to comment on Supreme Government's utter indifference to the affairs of Assam. "It must be remembered" he observed "that under our rule, it (Assam) has hitherto been treated as a thing of little or no value and that in its comparison with our other provinces it may be to use a homely expression, be said not to have had fair play."⁽¹⁾ He felt convinced that the whole system was vicious. Not only must the pyke system be abolished root and branch but the entire personnel must be removed. The system of native agency had received the fairest trial "under the superintendence of a man with great knowledge of the native character and of a disposition to delight in making proof of an untried scheme." Yet it failed and failed miserably. He pointed out that, under the circumstances nothing could succeed in Assam without the allotment of a sufficient number of European officers.⁽²⁾

New Divisions - The final arrangements for the province had been delayed so long, owing to the indecision of the Government regarding the restoration of Ahom monarchy in Upper Assam. The strong terms in which Robertson and the local authorities drew the attention of the Government to this fact ultimately forced them to arrive at a decision.

(3)
On 27 March 1833, in a minute recorded by Lord

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 93.

(2) Ibid.

(3) B.P.C. 30 May 1833, No. 96; P.L.I.B. 16 Jan. 1833, No. 248.

William Bentinck it was recommended that the territories on the West of the river Dhansiri should be divided into four

districts - Bishnath, central Assam, Lower Assam and the six

(1) Parganas. In each of these districts an officer, designated as Principal Assistant to the Commissioner, should be placed who was to be helped by a Junior Assistant. It was also proposed that Matthie should remain in charge of Lower Assam, while the six parganas were to be transferred to the officer in charge of Gowalpara. Captain Bogle was appointed as the Principal Assistant of central Assam with Rutherford as his assistant at Nowgong and Raha. Major White divested of all civil duties, continued as the Political Agent with the command of the Assam Light Infantry at Bishnath. (2)

It was however found extremely difficult to have even the minimum number of suitable officers and the two Junior Assistants at Gauhati and Gowalpara had to be procured from the Medical Service. (3) Later, as a result of Matthie's departure on sick leave, Bogle was transferred to Gauhati and Rutherford his Junior Assistant was left in charge of central Assam with Lieut. Vetch, an officer of the A.L.M. to supervise the affairs in Nowgong and Raha. (4)

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) P.L.I.B. 16 Jan. 1834, No. 2; B.P.C. 6 June, 1933, No. 108.

Changes in Judicature - The Principal Assistant was to officiate as a judge, magistrate and collector, aided in each case by the Junior Assistant. In civil cases he was vested with powers of deciding original suits from 500 to 1000 rupees and to hear all appeals from the lower courts. All suits exceeding 1000 rupees as well as special appeals had to be referred to the Commissioner.⁽¹⁾

In criminal matters he exercised the same authority as a magistrate of the Bengal district with the additional duty of investigating with the aid of a Jury or Panchayet, heinous offences which in the other districts were remanded to the Court of Circuit. At the close of the investigation the whole proceedings were transferred to the Commissioner's Court, to which the verdict of the Jury and magistrate's statements therein were annexed for final order.⁽²⁾

Naturally, the Panchayets working in conjunction with a European officer still continued to exist, but in civil cases in which the failure of the Panchayets had been complete, the mufasil Panchayets were abolished and the power previously vested in the revenue officers was likewise abrogated.⁽³⁾ Suits which had hitherto been left to these tribunals were now investigated under direct supervision and control of European

(1) Revenue and Judicial Administration, 1835; See Matthie's report, 15 Feb. 1835.

(2) Ibid.

(3) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 93.

officers, by the civil Panchayets at Gauhati and the Munshiff's court set up for the purpose in central Assam.⁽¹⁾

III. The Question of the Restoration of the Monarchy in Upper Assam.

Opinions as to the Project - The arrangements for Eastern Assam also were not delayed. Up to his death, Scott consistently urged the expediency of making over Upper Assam to a native prince. The mismanagement in the district coupled with repeated uprisings confirmed his views that proper justice could not be meted out to the people without the restoration of monarchy. "That an imperfect British administration" he conceived "whether occasioned by a deficiency of European officers or by an adherence to customs that are incompatible with the spirit of our rule must be worse than a native one, which if want of integrity and the best intentions(?) at least possesses a perfect knowledge of the ^{laws, customs and} lands and prejudices of its subjects and an intimate acquaintance with their peculiar revenue system on which if it is to be maintained in its present shape ^{so} much depends."⁽²⁾

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, No. 94; see statements exhibiting native establishments: In central Assam, besides the Sadr Amin's court at Mangaldai there were Munshiff's courts at Bishnath, Charduar, Noduar, one at the bank of the Bharali river and at Nowgong. There were two panchayets even now at Gauhati to investigate civil cases, one Senior and the other Junior.

(2) B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 50.

Scott advocated, however, a different policy altogether for the ^New frontier. To keep the border tribes under subjection he felt that there must be ~~some one~~ ^{some one} on the spot. The machinations of the Burmese in early 1830 through one ⁽¹⁾ Godadhar in this quarter impelled him to urge on the Government the necessity of maintaining a permanent military post, under a responsible officer at ~~Sadiya~~ ⁽²⁾ having at his disposal a small party of regular troops.

Scott was not to see the fulfilment of his project. His arguments considerably influenced the Supreme Government, but the final decision was postponed pending the appointment of the new Commissioner. Robertson was, however, not so sympathetic as Scott; he strongly recommended ⁽³⁾ the retention of Upper Assam as an integral part of the British dominion after making due provision for the ruling families; on the failure of such a scheme he was decidedly in favour of

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- (1) He was also a descendant of the Ahom royal family. He had to accompany Alu Meenge Barkuwari the Ahom princess, whom Ex-Raja Chandrakantha Singha had offered as a bribe to the Burmese monarch with a view to driving the invaders from Assam. He arrived at the frontier, it was alleged, as the Agent of the Government of Ava, to ascertain the feasibility of expelling the British from Assam with the aid of the hill tribes on the frontier (B.S.P.C. 25 June, No. 4.)
- (2) B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 50.
- (3) B.P.C. 30 July, 1832, No. 92.

restoration. In any case he deprecated the existing arrangements. "There are advantages in European as well as in a native administration" he observed. "But the system hitherto pursued in Assam has been something of a middle character," Robertson continued, "in which European principles of Government are brought into action without the aid of European integrity to carry them into practice and the consequence has been that native agents, relieved from the dread of prompt and fearful punishment which hangs over them under a native Government and vested with a power never entrusted to them, under a European rule have continued in an almost undisguised excess of extortion and abuse." "Conceiving this a middle course to be the very worst of any" he concluded "I cannot hesitate to recommend that it be forthwith abandoned and one or other of the systems before alluded to be established instead."⁽¹⁾

Decision in favour of Restoration - Robertson brought the issue to a head and towards the close of 1832 the decision on the restoration of the Ahom monarchy was taken by the Supreme Government. At the same time, it was resolved, as suggested by Scott, to establish a permanent military post at Sadiya.⁽²⁾

In spite of the untiring efforts of Neufville and White, Upper Assam continued to be an unprofitable concern. It did not yield so far any satisfactory revenue nor was there

(1) Ibid.

(2) B.P.C. 5 Nov. 1832, No. 4; 4 Feb. 1833, No. 124.

(1) any prospect of it for years to come. Apart from its economic aspect and the administrative difficulties resulting from the dearth of duly qualified officers, it was also evident that the official aristocracy would not easily acquiesce to the Government without a further struggle. That petty conspiracies would be sure to recur unless they were kept in good humour by offers of pensions and posts. It proved, however, extremely difficult to absorb them in the Government and well nigh impossible to provide them all with pecuniary assistance. By the restoration of the ancient régime it was fondly hoped "an end would be probably put to the plots and intrigues ... to avoid the odium necessarily attendant on the exclusion of the Royal family, the depression of the nobles, the neglect of the national religion and the disgust that is likely to be occasioned by frequent executions for criminal offences of a popular character." (2)

Personally, Lord William Bentinck was not happy at the surrender of a territory with the revenue about a lakh without being able to diminish any expenditure nor military force.

(1) It was pointed out to the court that out of an estimated revenue of a lakh there could not be any surplus for a few years to come, as a considerable amount would be required for the payment of the Raja and the nobility. P.L.I.B. 16 Jan, 1834, No. 2.

(2) B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 50.

Either in the interests of the people or of the Government,⁽¹⁾ he viewed the measure "as one of somewhat hazardous policy."

Nevertheless, it was determined to assign the division "experimentally" to a member of the Ahom royal family who might be considered fit to conduct the administration, on the principles of the former Government and to the satisfaction of the people.

Purandar Singha appointed King - who was to be raised to the Raj? - was the question which arose. There were two principal rival claimants - Ex-Raja Chandra Kanta Singha and Purandar Singha, besides several others of the family of full age.

Purandar's claim to the succession had been held⁽²⁾ to be superior to that of Chandra Kanta in view of his descent from King Rajeswar Singha (1751-79), son of Rudra Singha (1696-1714), whereas the latter descended from Lechai Namrupia Raja. According to the strict law of primogeniture, which, however, was not so much observed by the Ahom rulers, no one had a better claim than Giridhar, Namrupia Raja who was still living;⁽³⁾ he was the son of Rajeswar Singha's second son, while Purandar was the grandson of that ruler's third son.

It was not legality but expediency that decided the issue. Chandra Kanta's title to succeed his brother Kamaleswar was considered by Scott as "indisputable" although he was not

(1) B.P.C. 30 May 1833, No. 88; Minute by Lord William Bentinck, 27 March, 1833.

(2) B.S.P.C. 14 July, 1826, No. 2.

(3) I.P.C. 11 Feb. 1841, No. 118; Brodie to Jenkins, 29 Dec. '40.

favourably disposed towards him for his "extreme imbecility of mind", "indecision" "and aptitude to be easily misled by others."⁽¹⁾ Purandar too, Scott believed, was "easily swayed by low favourites" but brought up as he had been in his early days in the British territory, he had had a better education and was inspired with some degree of respect for and gratitude to the British Government for the favour conferred upon his family.⁽²⁾ In one of his last Despatches Scott had definitely discarded the claims of Chandra Kanta in favour of Purandar.⁽³⁾ Robertson, under instructions from the Government held several interviews with the rival candidates and finally reported his favourable opinion of Purandar's qualifications to fill the post. He felt that, the Ex-Raja was not likely to be satisfied with the restoration of a portion of his former possessions, while his rival would accept the elevation "as a boon" and accede faithfully to the terms on which it might be bestowed.⁽⁴⁾

The Treaty with Purandar - Accordingly, with the approval of the Government, on 2 March 1833 Robertson entered into an engagement with Purandar Singha at Gauhati;⁽⁵⁾ the main provisions of which were as follows:-

1) That the Company made over to Raja Purandar Singha the portion of Assam lying on the South Bank of the Brahmaputra to the east of Dhansiri and on the north bank to the

(1) B.S.P.C. 14 July, 1826, No. 2.

(2) Ibid.

(3) B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 50.

(4) B.P.C. 30 July, 1832, No. 92.

(5) Aitchison, Treaties & Engagements H 135-37

east of a river near Bishnath.

2) The Raja promised to pay to the Company an annual tribute of Rs. 50,000.

3) He bound himself, in the administration of justice, to abstain from the cruel practices of the former Rajas of Assam and that he would generally assimilate the administration of justice in his territory to that which prevailed in the Company's possessions.

4) He further agreed to listen with attention to the advice of the Political Agent in Upper Assam or to that of the Agent to the Governor General.

5) He also promised to surrender, on demand from the British officials any fugitive from justice who might take refuge in his territory and he was to apply to those officers for the arrest of any individuals who might flee from his territory into that of the Company's or of any other States.

6) It was distinctly understood that the treaty invested the Raja with no power over the Moamaria country of the Barsenapati.

7) In the event of Purandar's continuing faithful to the terms of the treaty, the British Government agreed to protect him from foreign aggression, but if he should in any way depart from a faithful adherence to the same and be guilty of oppressing the people of the country entrusted to his charge, it was reserved to that Government either to transfer the said territory

to another ruler or to take it into its own immediate occupation.

It was evident, that the restored monarch was a creature of the British Government and responsible to them alone. Neither the wishes of the people nor those of the Dangorias, were ever consulted nor were any of the former constitutional checks revived. To safeguard the interests of the people from a weak or tyrannical ruler, constant interference on the part of the paramount state had now become an unpleasant necessity. The Sword of Democles, which thus

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- (1) The important feature of the Ahom Government, was the the great power exercised by the three Dangorias or Gohains - Buragohain, Bor Gohain and Bor Patra Gohain. "They were permanent and hereditary counsellors of the state little inferior to the Monarch in rank. On all occasions their counsel and on all important affairs their concurrence, were indispensable. They proclaimed the Monarch and could depose him in the instance of incapacity or great delinquency." Welsh's Report on Assam 1794; See Mackenzie, North East Frontier of Bengal, pp. 378-79.
- (2) Apart from the Gohains there was another constitutional check in the 'Barmel' or the Assembly of the Officers of the Govt as far down as the Saikias. In the event of restoration, Scott suggested recognising and confirming the power of the Gohains and also reviving with certain modifications, the former authority of the 'Barmel'. That measures should be adopted for preventing collision between that body and the king by strictly defining the authority of the latter and requiring the king to have the concurrence of at least two Gohains to carry out any measure affecting the whole country.
(B.S.P.C. 14 July, 1826, No. 2.)

hung over the Raja, deprived him of his power and initiative, and even the respect of his subjects.

Purandar shouldered the burdens of a country of doubtful value at a price that was too high. The tribute was fixed by guesswork and not based on the actual resources of the country. Even then the crazy Raja did not hesitate to collect the arrears of the British Government, augmenting thereby the pressure on him as well as on his own ryots. What was worse, the Raja agreed to surrender half of his estimated revenue, while his immediate neighbour, the Moamaria chief enjoyed total exemption from any payment. No change whatever was made in his agreements with Scott. Thus the ryots were tempted more than ever to emigrate from Upper Assam to the territory of the Muttocks, where little or no taxation prevailed. Unless the expedients adopted by Neufville were resorted to or the Senapati were also placed on the same footing, the discrimination must hit the Raja hard. "It appears to us very doubtful" the Directors rightly observed, "whether this chief will be able to pay an annual tribute amounting to half of his gross revenue without involving himself in embarrassments."⁽²⁾

(1) B.R.C. 12 Aug. 1833, Nos. 3-4; the arrears, on the eve of the restoration had amounted to Rs. 155,000; out of this Rs. 83,000 were written off and the Raja undertook to collect the balance on a commission of one anna in the rupee, on such part of the amount he could recover.

(2) C.D. 3 Dec. 1834, No. 14, Para 39.

The Court of Directors on the Restoration - The Court was indeed from the very beginning opposed to the project of restoration, feeling that an arrangement of this nature could never succeed. "By reserving to ourselves the discretionary right of interference," the Directors observed, "we should in fact incur the obligation of interfering whenever the country is mismanaged and experience justifies us in believing that occasions for the exercise of the right would certainly occur and that we should at length be compelled to undo our work."⁽¹⁾ They were, however, confident that it would not be carried into effect inasmuch as Lord William Bentinck himself entertained strong doubts as to the expediency of the measure. It was no wonder therefore, that on receipt of the tidings they were so surprised and dissatisfied as to comment severely on the action of the Supreme Government. "In carrying into effect a measure of so much importance" the Court remarked to the Governor General, "of such a questionable policy and of no urgency whatever without a previous reference to us, you have incurred our disapprobation". "We are only prevented from annulling the whole transaction" it was added "by our reluctance to do anything which might weaken your authority."⁽²⁾

At the time the despatch reached England, the restoration of the Ahom monarchy under Raja Purandar Singha had become an accomplished fact. Nothing was left to the Directors but to authorize a fair trial to the experiment.

(1) Ibid. Para 28.

(2) Ibid, Para 34.

CHAPTER FIVE.

THE FAILURE OF AN EXPERIMENT

(1833 - 1838)

I. The Administration of Raja Purandar Singha.

The die was now cast. On 29 April, 1833, under a salute of nineteen guns Purandar Singha was formally installed as a Raja at Jorhat. The troops made demonstrations in front of his palace. The nobility paid their obeisance.⁽¹⁾ Preparations were also set on foot for the customary ceremony of coronation.⁽²⁾ The people, however, accepted the change with mixed feelings and in fact an influential group stood in opposition. Not long after, Ex-Raja Chandra Kanta, raising a protest against the action of the Government "as inconsistent with the principle of justice and equity" urged his own claim to the throne. To obviate the chance of any collision, the Ex-Raja was forthwith removed to Kaliabar and was subsequently silenced with a pension of 500 rupees

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 112.

(2) This ceremony was performed in a specially built house with a timber platform, known as 'Patghar' or 'Singarighar'. "The Raja and the Queen first enter the patghar, where some water is poured on them from a shell called Dokhyinaborto Sonkho, the mouth of which turned the way contrary to that of the shell, which is usually sounded by the Hindus in order to attract a little notice from the Gods." Bhuyan, Tungkhungia Buranji, Glossary, p. 243.

(1)
a month.

Problems before the Raja - Raja Purandar had to confront problems which might have baffled an abler administrator. He had to face the worst of the feudal abuses aggravated by the anarchy and misrule for more than half a century. The Khel system was in ruins. In spite of the incalculable depopulation, the former subordinate officials were still maintained, even increased to meet the needs of the conflicting Khels now acattered throughout the division.⁽²⁾ But the irony was that very few of the Kheldars could tell the exact number of pykes from which they had to collect or the places where they were to be found. To enquire into such details was even considered derogatory on the part of the higher officials. Consequently, the ryots were left entirely at the mercy of the unscrupulous petty collectors, whose irregular exactions reduced them to piteous misery. It is difficult to conceive that anything was ever left uncollected, yet it was almost impossible for the ryot to prove that he had paid his dues. To adminster justice⁽³⁾ not less than five courts were set up at Joshat, but the fact that they were concentrated at the Sadr rendered speedy justice impossible. The cry of the oppressed peasantry, therefore,

(1) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833 Nos. 115-116; 8 Aug. 1836, Nos. 34-35.

(2) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 87; Memo by White; B.P.C. 19 June, 1834, No. 99; White to Jenkins, 23 May, '34.

(3) To deal with civil cases there existed the EBar Panchayet with four members and a President, two smaller courts, Barbarrua's Court and a Surrasuree Court.

(1)
 paled into insignificance ere it reached the tribunal. In the absence of security of life and property, there were constant migrations, agriculture declined, industry was neglected and trade and commerce - if there were any - practically collapsed.

The Regulations of Purandar - The task before the restored monarch was indeed formidable. He had not only to retrieve a dying cause, but also to rescue a depressed people. He had to conciliate a nobility on the verge of bankruptcy and at the same time give relief to a peasantry reduced to abject poverty. Above all, he had to maintain the customs and institutions of his predecessors. With these objects in view, in consultation with Major White and the higher officials the Raja introduced a series of regulations, which may be summarised under the following heads:-

- (a) Revenue - The Khels were to be reorganised with definite boundaries. Each pyke was to receive two puras of land in return for a capitation tax of Rs. 3/- per head; receipts were to be given regularly for the payment. After ascertaining assets, settlements had to be made with the Kheldars for four years and in no case was a deduction to be made in the Jumma. In addition to the remuneration in pykes, the Kheldars were allowed to have a small commission on the total collection. On no account were the Kheldars allowed to leave their charge without the permission of the king and only after the appointment of a deputy in his place. (3)

(1) B.P.C. 19 June, 1834, No. 99; White to Jenkins, 23 May, 1834.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

It was also laid down, that no revenue charge was to be given thereafter to anyone who could not read or write. Towards that object, a school was to be started in each khel. If suitable candidates were not available from the nobles, the office would be open to all, irrespective of caste or creed. (1)

(b) Judicial - (1) Court of Kheldars - To break up the overcentralization at Joshat, Kheldars were empowered to try criminal offences involving a penalty not exceeding six months' imprisonment and with power to inflict punishment of 15 stripes or a fine of Rs. 20. They were further to have jurisdiction in civil cases and to investigate complaints of exactions of the revenue Amahs. (2)

(2) District Courts - Judges with the title of 'Gram Adhikars' were set up at Rangpur, Bassa, Dayang, Majuli, Lakhimpur (Ootarpur). They had appellate jurisdiction over the Court of Kheldars and power to enquire into cases of exaction or complaints against those officers. Apart from that, they had the power of investigating civil cases to the extent of Rs. 100/- and decide criminal cases of minor importance.

No written pleadings or depositions were allowed in the above Courts; they were, however, required to submit a monthly abstract of the cases tried.

(3) At the Capital (i) to deal with minor cases, there were two panchayets (ii) also the Barbarua's Panchayet with a President and four members with power of awarding sentences of up to three years' imprisonment and of trying civil cases to the extent of Rs. 500/-; (iii) At the head stood the Sadr Court with three judges and the Raja as President to decide all serious crimes of dacoites and murder and of civil cases above Rs. 1000/-. (3)

(c) Moral and Material - That, Mad Raja Purandar Singha was sincerely desirous of improving the condition of his subjects, is evident from the measures described above. He may have had mediocre abilities, yet he had the insight to diagnose the root of the evils and applied proper remedies for

their removal. Into the old setting he attempted to infuse the British spirit and his measures aimed not merely at the reform of existing institutions but also at the moral and material progress of his subjects. He imposed a penalty of 14 years' imprisonment for the enslavement of a pyke. Feeling that unless the inferior Amlahs were well paid, they would resort to unfair means, he determined that the amount collected from fines and civil cases should be appropriated to their payment. (1) He encouraged the cultivation of waste lands and took a keen interest in the experimental tea plantations at Jaypur. He hoped that his subjects would reap the benefit in the future from the new enterprise^{then} undertaken by the British Government. (2) To stimulate industry, Kheldars were encouraged to take produce in lieu of revenue in places where merchants could not yet penetrate. He also declared the Chokey on the Brahmaputra open and that no duty was to be levied on boats up and down the river. (3)

Opposition of the Nobility - That a thorough overhauling of the whole system was highly needed, the Raja knew well. But that would mean a revolution. What he wanted was reform not revolution. Yet, some of the measures - e.g. those on slavery, education, and throwing open the public services, were

(1) Ibid.

(2) B.R.C. 11 July, 1836, Nos. 5-6.

(3) B.P.C. 19 June, 1834, No. 99; White to Jenkins, 23 May, '34.

ahead of the time and struck at the interests of the upper classes, to whom the restoration was practically meaningless, without a complete return to the old order. The regulations proved extremely galling even to those who were favourably disposed towards him. Naturally they were disgusted and disappointed at the conduct of the Raja; so in spite of his earnest endeavours to take them into his confidence, the party in opposition mustered great strength and attempted throughout to harass and frustrate him. (1)

Barsenapati - The presence of the Moamaria chief, paying no tribute, in the neighbourhood was of the nature of an ulcer to the Raja. Under him, the inhabitants of Muttock were lightly taxed and received from him particular care of their welfare. No collection was ever made where poverty existed and advances were given even to the immigrants, whose taxation, though heavier, was only one third of their former revenue. All cases of extortion were severely dealt with and agriculture was encouraged by all possible means. (2)

With such inducements emigration to Muttock was

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- (1) It was reported by White that "He has been thwarted by a portion of the nobles who from the first were inimical to his succession and who were now doggedly persistent in resisting the collections as much as they can."
- (2) B.P.C. 13 Apr. 1835, No. 4; White to Jenkins, 26 Jan. '35. In contrast to Upper Assam Major White was surprised to find a luxuriant growth of diverse crops throughout Muttock. He saw extensive rice fields, intermingled with sugar cane, 'surso' (mustard), opium, cotton, silk besides abundance of tea plants in the forests. No tolls existed to fetter internal trade. Marwari merchants had already settled in different parts of the country while the cotton trade was actually going on along the Brahmaputra.

inevitable, particularly when the pressure of revenue was higher in the Raja's territory. The anomalous situation between the two chiefs was brought to the notice of the Supreme Government by Robertson, who recommended the imposition of a tribute on the Senapati. The attitude of the Government to the chief, however, was one of "moderation" and the Agent was reminded "that it is of the utmost importance that the chiefs of these wild tribes should be well affected towards our rule."⁽¹⁾

Early in 1835, an attempt was nevertheless made by Major White to commute the service of the contingents supplied by the chief for a payment of Rs. 10,000.⁽²⁾ In spite of the fact that the prospect was held out to him of the title of Raja with guaranteed succession to his sons, should he come to terms, the Senapati opposed the project vehemently. He told the Major, that if the Government was determined to tax his subjects, they must take the country into their own hands; he would rather go out, than raise such a tax. As a result, Major White could effect little excepting an agreement by which the services of the pykes were commuted for a payment of Rs. 1800.⁽³⁾ So long as the situation on the Sadiya frontier continued to be unsatisfactory the neutrality, if not the active alliance, of the Senapati, with the Muttocks

(1) B.P.C. 22 Aug., 1833, Nos. 67-9.

(2) B.P.C. 13 Apr. 1835, No. 4, White to Jenkins, 26 Jan. '35.

(3) Aitchison; Treaties & Engagements, pp. 141-42.

solidly behind him, was essential. It was therefore considered inexpedient to make a heavy demand on them, at all events during the lifetime of the present incumbent. (1)

Robertson on the Raja's Administration - Nevertheless, the first year of Purandar's reign passed off uneventfully and smoothly. Although there was a little fall in revenue, he cleared off the tribute. Early in 1834, Robertson observed: "I am happy to be able to speak well of the Raja Poorandar Sing. Though many of the higher order of the Assamese are discontented with his rule, yet we are sure to receive the most favourable accounts of his actions and all agree in admitting that, he has hitherto proved to the bulk of the people a mild and beneficent master and this is confirmed by the fact of no emigration having as yet taken place into our territory nor as far as we can learn into those of the Bursenapattee and other independent chiefs in the remote parts of Upper Assam." (2)

Administrative Changes - This was the final communiqué by Mr Robertson, who left Assam in March 1834, in consequence of certain administrative changes in the North East Frontier. Since 1831, with the imposition of additional duties of a commissioner of revenue and circuit, it had become extremely difficult on the part of the ^{Agent to the Governor General} Political Agent to discharge

(1) B.P.C. 13 Apr. 1835, No. 5.

(2) B.P.C. 25 March, 1834, No. 38.

efficiently his duties over the whole of the extensive frontier. Under the circumstances, in January 1834, to effect proper supervision, the district of Sylhet was annexed to Dacca and separate arrangements were made for Cachar, Manipur and the Khasia Hills. At the same time the office of the Governor General's Agent on the North East Frontier of Bengal and Commissioner of Assam was abolished and Captain Jenkins was nominated to the distinct office of Commissioner and Agent to the Governor General for Assam and the North East Rangpur. He was also placed under the control of the Sadr Dewani Adawlat and of the Sadr Board of Revenue.⁽¹⁾

Francis Jenkins - "A man of versatile ability and genius", Jenkins began his career as a commissioned officer in the 1/24th Native Infantry. He also served as the Assistant Secretary to the Military Board and then under the political department in Arakan.⁽²⁾ In 1831, being deputed along with Lieut. Pemberton to undertake the survey of Assam, Cachar and Manipur, he had acquired a local knowledge in addition to his 'tried Capacity' and was therefore considered indispensable to be in charge of the newly acquired territory. Under orders of the Government Capt. Jenkins relieved Robertson, who,

(1) C.D. 25 Sept., 1835, No. 44, Paras 13 and 14.

(2) Hodson, V.C.P., Officers of the Bengal Army (1758-1834); Part II, pp. 549-50; Son of Rev. Francis Jenkins, born in Cornwall, 4 Aug. 1793; arrived in India 8 Oct. 1810, ensign 1811, Lieutenant 1816, Captain 1830, Major, 1849, Lieut.Col. 1851, retired Feb. 1861, honorary Major-General 31 Dec. 1861, died at Gauhati, 28 Aug. 1866.

serving for a time as a Commissioner of Muttock and also the Judge of the Badr Court, became, in 1835, a member of the Supreme Council.⁽¹⁾

II. Conflict in Jurisdiction.

Jenkins' Early Relations with Raja Purandar - Captain Jenkins' relations with the Raja at the beginning were sympathetic, if not cordial. He fully appreciated the difficulties under which the Raja was placed. Apart from the uncompromising attitude of a section of the nobility, who attempted to thwart him at every step, Jenkins realised that his territory was bordered on one side by a state where assessment was exceedingly low and on the other by British possessions where redress for over-exaction or injustice could easily be obtained. "The intermediary Raja's country has been saddled with an amount of tribute" he remarked "that made a diminution of our rates not readily practicable, while the Agent he had employed required a vigilance and an experience and a power in the head which was wanting to Raja Poorundar Sing."⁽²⁾ In concurrence with Major White, he strongly recommended the necessity of imposing a tax at least on the immigrants in Muttock. In any case, he was convinced of the responsibility of the Government to support the Raja as far as practicable.⁽³⁾

(1) Buckland; Dictionary of Indian Biography, p. 362.

(2) B.P.C. 19 June, 1834, No. 99.

(3) Ibid.

The Right of Interference - Unfortunately, the attitude of Jenkins was changed. He was led to believe before long, that the Raja was in the wrong, and that the grievances of the nobles were genuine. ⁽¹⁾ In the middle of 1835, the importunities of a number of people whom the Raja branded as 'offenders and men of bad character' and who took refuge in British possessions influenced Captain Jenkins to demand an explanation from the Raja of his conduct towards these individuals, urging on him at the same time the expediency of conciliating the discontented nobles. ⁽²⁾ The temper of the Raja was also not submissive; considering it to be an affront to his dignity the Raja replied:

"Should you think that justice is not done to the people remember that one cannot please both parties. The loser will always fancy himself wronged and appeal to a higher power. But this does not prove injustice to have been done. If it be your intention to hear appeals and continue to question me on all my actions in such petty cases, you ought in the first place instead of making me a Raja have made me a judge or magistrate." ⁽³⁾

In the present case, Jenkins himself believed that 'no great amount of injustice was done. "Yet," he remarked, "we

(1) B.P.C. 3 Aug. 1835, No. 8; That Jenkins was considerably poisoned in mind by a number of anonymous letters is apparent from the following extract of a letter, which he wrote to the Government, recommending the appointment of a Vakil, to protect the nobles from the alleged oppression of the Raja. "Only yesterday" he wrote, "I received an anonymous but I believe a genuine petition in the name of the principal persons at Joshat complaining of the oppression they were subject to and soliciting that a vakeel on the part of the Political Agent should reside at Joshat."

(2) B.P.C. 3 Aug., 1835, No. 8.

(3) B.P.C. 3 Aug., 1835, No. 8; Purandar to Jenkins.

cannot know what would be the case if we were to withdraw this check altogether." To get a clarification of the point at issue - the right of interference, he referred the matter to the Government of India with observations that "Were we now to be free to choose a question whether it were better to take the Government of the country immediately into our own hands or to manage it through the intervention of a native ruler, I should have no hesitation in saying, it is my decided opinion that it would be in every way desirable to assume the direct management of that portion of the Province."⁽¹⁾

Obviously, the Captain had been greatly irritated by the point-blank answer of the Raja. The latter was invested in fact with full power of civil and criminal jurisdiction over his subjects and was therefore, not liable to render any account of his actions unless occasioned by oppression or any breach of the treaty.⁽²⁾ It was also provided that if any culprit took refuge in the British territory, he should be immediately handed over to the Raja and vice versa. Instead of being made over, they were now given shelter and even encouraged to conduct themselves in a manner calculated to weaken the position of the Raja. This fact, even the Government could not ignore. Although Jenkins was allowed to interfere in the affairs of the Raja, he was instructed to exercise this right "with moderation and discretion."⁽³⁾

(1) B.P.C. 3 Aug. 1835, No. 8.

(2) See Articles 3 and 9, Treaty with Purandar Singha: Aitchison, Treaties, pp. 136-7; also ante p. 104.

(3) B.P.C. 3 Aug. 1835, No. 9.

Withdrawal of Military Guards - Early in the same year Jenkins directed the Political Agent in Upper Assam to remove from Jorhat the military guards which were kept there, to Sadiya; presuming their presence would enable the Raja to intimidate the people so that they dared not show resentment against his despotic rule. (1)

In the meantime, on the revolt of some tributary Nagas, Purandar wanted to despatch an expedition against them and at the same time he solicited the aid of the Government for the defence of the Naga frontier. The coercive measures against the refractory Nagas had become all the more necessary in view of the fact, that the Naga frontier afforded an asylum to the runaways who attempted to evade taxation. (2)

But the request was not complied with by Jenkins, who advised the Raja to give up his warlike designs against the Nagas.

III. Arrears in Revenue and Tribute.

Rapid Fall in Revenue - Raja Purandar was thus disillusioned in his expectations of getting the full support of the Government in his actions. His position was considerably compromised and his enemies naturally exploited the situation, to their own best advantage. Still he felt secure, provided he could keep his contract with the Government. Here too, he was greatly

(1) B.P.C. 30 Mar., 1835, Nos. 5-6.

(2) B.P.C. 4 May, 1835, Nos. 1-2; White to Jenkins, 11 Apr. '35.

disappointed. There was a rapid fall in revenue and consequent arrears in tribute as given below. ⁽¹⁾

<u>Year</u>	<u>Collections</u>	<u>Tribute Paid.</u>
1833-34	69,450	50,000
1834-35	70,150	50,000
1835-36	64,254	34,000
1836-37	54,449	28,000
1837-38	42,216	- - -

This rapid fall must be attributed largely to causes over which the Raja had little or no control. In the absence of commercial and manufacturing industries, the fiscal resources of Upper Assam were very limited. Jenkins too ⁽²⁾ admitted the difficulties arising from the scarcity of coin, which rendered it impossible for the most willing ryot, to pay off his dues to the Government. Even under British rule, the revenue of Upper Assam hardly exceeded in any year more than a lakh of rupees and on an average it was 91,096. ⁽³⁾ The immediate decline under the Raja's administration was partly due to the transfer of No Duar, a district in Darrang yielding a revenue of about 10,000, ⁽⁴⁾ to Lower Assam and partly to the removal of civil and military establishments which effectively checked the recirculation of a considerable amount. Nevertheless,

(1) I.P.C. 16 May, 1838, No. 53, vide statements B. & C.; I.P.C. 12 June, 1837, No. 60, 31 July 1837, No. 70.

(2) Journal of Jenkins, paras 74-5.

(3) I.P.C. 16 May, 1838, No. 53. See Statement A.

(4) I.P.C. 23 Jan, 1837, No. 59; White to Jenkins, 15 Dec. 1836.

the Raja remitted in full the first two years' tribute and also collected an arrear to the Government of Rs. 31,000, which had been considered 'irrecoverable'.⁽¹⁾ The crash, however, came in the third year (1835-36). In consequence of an outbreak of cholera and a famine following it, the ryots offered resistance to the collection of taxes. There were huge arrears, the Raja failed to meet his obligations and could never recover solvency.⁽²⁾

To fill the cup of misery, in the same year in the settlement of Nowgong and Darrang the fishermen and the braziers were exempted from taxation. Naturally, the people of these communities in the adjoining areas made their way into British possession, which undoubtedly affected the Raja's finances.⁽³⁾ He drew the attention of the Government to the harm done to him by the measure, requesting an enhancement of the assessment on the refugees from his country or a deduction from the tribute on their account.⁽⁴⁾ Notwithstanding the sympathetic consideration of the Political Agent, Jenkins conceived that the real cause of the desertion of the ryots, the diminution of the revenue and also of the difficulties experienced by the Raja in the payment of tribute, was the oppressive character of his own Government.⁽⁵⁾

(1) B.R.C. 9 May, 1836, Nos. 1-3.

(2) I.P.C. 14 Nov., 1836, No. 32; White to Jenkins.
I.P.C. 16 May, 1838, No. 53; Purandar to Jenkins.

(3) I.P.C. 14 Nov. 1836, No. 32; White to Jenkins.

(4) Ibid.

(5) I.P.C. 14 Nov. 1836, No. 32. Jenkins to the Government of India.

Report of Major White - Subsequently, in order to make a personal enquiry into the actual state of affairs, Major White visited the Raja's territory towards the close of 1836. He formed the impression that there had been some mismanagement, but that was occasioned mainly by the pressing burden of the (1) tribute paid by the Raja.

"It appears to me" he reported" that under all circumstances the Raja's management has been good in collecting 25,000 rupees per annum. He has been on the throne for the last three and a half years, the tribute for the first two years has been paid and about 35,000 rupees of arrears due to the British Government, for which he was not bound by the treaty; it will be found that he had paid considerably more than three years' tribute." "It is evident" he added "that he had exerted himself to fulfil his pecuniary obligations to the Government to the utmost, but it appears to me utterly impossible that he can pay such a high rate of tribute and discharge his duties to his subjects as regards the great ends of the Government." "It cannot be considered that his government has had a fair trial," he concluded "but making due allowance for them, I am of opinion that it has worked as well as could have been expected." (2)

Jenkins' Disagreement - Even the eloquent testimony of Major White could not move Jenkins. He remained as obdurate as ever. "My information," he remarked "as to the state of emigration and internal administration of the country does not tally with what had been submitted by White." (3) He was rather inclined to think that the Raja had belied the expectations of the Government.

(1) I.P.C. 23 Jan. 1837, No. 59, White to Jenkins 15 Dec. '36.

(2) Ibid.

(3) I.P.C. 23 Jan. 1837, No. 59.

Neither were the nobles provided for nor the people satisfied. On the other hand, the restoration of the Raja had been attended with loss to the Government. "It would be of the highest advantage to the Government and to the people of Assam" he observed "if the Raja resigned from the administration even in lieu of a grant equal to that of his net revenue." (1)

In consequence of the divergence of opinion and aims between the two officials the Government of India had no alternative but to direct Captain Jenkins to obtain a personal knowledge of the state of affairs in the territory of Raja Purandar Singha. The opinion of the Government was at the same time intimated to him, that there was no objection to a reduction in the amount of tribute by way of experiment for a period of two or three years, if the tribute really pressed too heavily on the Raja and also if there was any probability of its remission proving conducive to the prosperity of the country. On the other hand, if there was reason to believe that the diminution of revenue was owing to the inherent defect of the Raja's government, Jenkins was instructed to report the means most expedient for effecting the improvement of the district. (2)

Jenkins' Tour in Upper Assam - Accordingly, early in 1838 Captain Jenkins commenced his Tour. He left Bishnath on 10 January and taking a land route he visited Lakhimpur, Gaurisagar,

(1) I.P.C. 23 Jan. 1837, No. 59.

(2) I.P.C. 23 Jan., 1837, No. 60.

Rangpur, Gargaon, Borhat and Jaypur. He then took a boat to Jorhat, where he stayed till the middle of March 1838. (1)

The Journal of Upper Assam, which Jenkins submitted in two parts to the Government, is a document of unique historical importance for the province of Assam. Not only does it offer a brilliant glimpse of the moribund Ahom monarchy under Raja Purandar, but it also throws considerable light on the attitude of the neighbouring hill tribes, besides giving a picture of the decaying families, the struggling peasantry and the rising communities. Above all, the Journal supplies information of great economic, geographical and statistical importance. (2)

IV. Administrative Mismanagement.

The Report of Jenkins - In his reports Captain Jenkins describes the whole of Upper Assam as very fertile. He also found evidence that the country was once very thickly populated, though now its inhabitants did not exceed 250,000 - a good deal less than when the country was transferred to the Raja. (3)

The wholesale desertion of ryots, according to Jenkins

(1) I.P.C. 28 Mar. 1838, Nos. 44-5; 4 Apr. No. 121.

(2) Part I - Journal of Jenkins' proceedings from the time of leaving Bishnath to his arrival at Gauhati.
Part II - A further Journal of his proceedings during his stay at Jorhat, from 21 Feb. to 14 Mar. 1838.

(3) I.P.C. 16 May, 1838 No. 53; The report of Jenkins.

was due to the exactions from those who remained on account of those who emigrated. Besides over-taxation, the people complained to him of the venality of the Raja's officers, the want of any efficient protection against the inroads of the hill tribes, who carried off their cattle, property and families, the constant and burdensome exactions of personal service by the Raja and all those who were in office and above all "the maladministration of the Raja's courts which the people assert afford no assurance that they should be protected in any rights or obtain redress for any injuries inflicted upon them, without their having the means of bribing the officers of the Government." "I fear," the Captain asserted "there is too much reason that this statement is mainly correct and I also fear there has been much irregular interference with the decision of the courts by the members of the Raja's family."⁽¹⁾

In consequence of all this, there had been a considerable emigration with a corresponding fall in revenue, which had now sunk to Rs. 42,216. The resources of the country had not however fallen off to the degree which Jenkins would seem to indicate. The expenses of the Court and even the maintenance of the Raja and his families being now charged upon the gross revenue - in the services of the pykes - the net revenue of 42,216 might, according to Jenkins be considered almost entirely as surplus, available for the payment of tribute.⁽²⁾

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

"I apprehend" he remarked, "(even if a remission of a part of the tribute were made,) that it is very doubtful from the character of the Raja and the impression his rule has made upon the people, whether he would be able to institute an efficient reorganisation of the government in all its branches and I can see no safety for even half the tribute without this being done."⁽¹⁾

Partial Resumption Proposed - He could not, however, ignore the fact, that the Raja was placed under most difficult circumstances. That the emigration was due in great measure to the lower rate of taxation in Muttock and by the entire abolition in British Assam of transit duties, poll tax and personal service. That he was given authority over a people, of which the great majority of the upper classes were opposed to him individually while the lower orders were equally indifferent to the frequent changes in Government. "I have no doubt" Jenkins remarked "that many of the people about him have taken advantage of his ruling passion - a lust for money and purposely counselled him wrongly with a view to involving him in difficulties and getting rid of a government they were averse to."⁽²⁾ On these personal considerations, Captain Jenkins in conclusion proposed, that he should be treated with indulgence. He recommended the resumption not of the whole of the country, but only of a portion of it - the whole north

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

bank, Majuli and the tract between Buri Dihing and Disang, yielding a revenue of 34,000 rupees, leaving in the Raja's possession the remaining portion to be held under certain conditions, free of tribute. ⁽¹⁾

Observations on the Report - On the whole, according to Captain Jenkins, the administration of Raja Purandar Singha was the worst of its kind. The efficiency of a government, however, depends not entirely on the individual at the head but on the character and integrity of the individuals who compose the whole of it. Captain Jenkins was perhaps right in doubting whether even with a remission of revenue, the Raja could carry out an effective reorganisation, but not because of the character of the Raja himself ~~ast~~ of the officials employed under him. The Amlahs being influenced by excessive bribes were in the habit of protecting robbers, concealing ⁽²⁾ thefts and other malpractices common to the Darogas of the time.

(1) Ibid.

(2) The gross corruption of the Sheristadar and the Amlahs of the Sadr Court will be evident from the following:- A robbery took place at Sadiya, which was under the jurisdiction of the Political Agent in Upper Assam. The thief was subsequently arrested in the territory of the Raja where he had also committed similar offences. On Major White's requisition to surrender the culprit he was assured that the prisoner would be handed over after the trial of several cases which were then pending at Jorhat. In the meantime, without the knowledge of the king, the Judicial Sheristadar by a confidential note to the Daroga released the prisoner. Apparently, by bribery one of the most notorious offenders in the country got off scot free. The Raja, however, took immediate and deterrent measures by dismissing the whole gang of corrupt Amlahs. (I.P.C. 23 Jan. 1837, No. 59; White to Jenkins).

This was aggravated by the fact that they were now debarred from receiving a fixed salary and were therefore encouraged to earn a livelihood by irregular means. Obviously they could not maintain that high moral tone which higher officials, unfettered by such necessities, could naturally assume.

There was a certain amount of miscarriage of justice - no one can deny it. It does not mean, however, that there was a complete denial of justice and that the court of the Raja was nothing short of an engine of extortion and oppression. It must also be remembered that in this part of the country it had been a regular custom for suitors to propitiate the offerings of judge by some kind. Under the particular circumstances it may be argued that it was not at all objectionable and did not operate so perniciously as might appear, since it was well understood that a judge was not precluded from giving a just verdict by taking a present. "In fact the self-denying spirit inculcated by the British Regulations was the object of much astonishment to the Assamese." (1) In practice, therefore, although the assessors of the Raja's court and even the Raja himself undoubtedly accepted presents, White rightly disagreed that "this tax upon justice falls heavier than the fees upon the judicial proceedings in the provincial courts and the dasturs given to the Amlahs with the view of expediting business." "I have not heard," he reported, "the rectitude of the Raja's Dewani decisions much impugned." "On the contrary," he remarked "I believe they have given more satisfaction than

(1) I.P.C. 23 Jan. 1837, No. 59. White to Jenkins.

those of the European predecessors, who with the best of intentions were more likely to commit errors (in) the delicate questions regarding the succession, inheritances, violation of castes, marriage contracts etc. from their comparative ignorance of the language and customs of the country and corruption of the

(1) Amlahs." Actually, the administration of justice had never been pure or efficient even before and long after the rule of Raja Purandar in Upper Assam. (2)

(1) Ibid.

(2) On the administration of justice towards the close of the Company's rule in Assam, the following observations were made by Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan, a leading personality of the time to Mr A.J.M. Mills in 1854 - "The public Courts of Justice are exclusively for the benefit of the rich and powerful, that it is both imprudent and foolish for men in humble life to resort to them for relief, that cunning and deceits, falsehood and perjury beset the courts on all sides and that in the criminal and civil courts truth is often transformed into falsehood and falsehood into truth the consequence is the people in the interior of the country entertain the utmost dread to resort to the public tribunals for redress and are obliged in the majority of instances passively to submit to injury and oppression." (Vide Mills' Report on Assam Appendix (J) p. 46; also Bhuyan, Asamar Padya Buranji, pp. 205-9).

The reaction of the pressure of tribute on the administration was equally great. The Raja surrendered about two-thirds of the revenue to the British Government, and with the rest supported himself and ran the administration. Whatever Jenkins might say, a considerable amount was required for the payment of the troops, for the maintenance of police, courts of justice, religious institutions, temples, schools and other objects connected with his government. (1) In his frantic efforts to meet the demands of the British Government and with the gradual decline in revenue, his troops and officials remained unpaid, favourites and partisans were neglected, religious festivals and ceremonious occasions were completely abandoned. (2) It was inevitable that the frontier guards should be withdrawn and the people left to the raids of the hill tribes; their control over the Amlahs was relaxed and justice could not be had without adequately paying for it; the number of enemies, who consistently and systematically worked for his ruin, swelled considerably. The more the decline, the greater the demands on the collectors and the

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- (1) During the administration of Purnananda Bura-Gohain (1783-1817), the disbursement in money had been estimated at Rs. 175,200 out of a total income of Rs. 256,600 (Mills' Report, Appendix B, p. 77); from the statement of revenue collectors Brodie found in 1837-38 the number of pykes to be 9478. Out of these 2322 were allowed to the different revenue officers as their remuneration. Of the remaining pykes, the collection amounted to Rs. 61,304, out of which the expenditure incurred by the Raja was estimated at Rs. 27,669. (I.P.C. 21 Nov. 1838, No. 114; Brodie to Jenkins)
- (2) I.P.C. 23 Jan. 1837, No. 59; White to Jenkins.

heavier the pressure on the ryots, for whom no alternative
 (1)
 was left but to flee.

V. The Resumption of Upper Assam.

The Decision of the Government of India - The report of Jenkins sounded the death-knell of Purandar's régime. In May 1838, the President in Council came to the conclusion that it would not be proper to leave any part of the country in the hands of a chief, who had forfeited it by misgovernment and by his non-payment of tribute and who had shown himself totally unfit to
 (2)
 rule. Lord Auckland, the Governor General, concurring in

the opinion observed: "When I see ... the Raja to be mainly influenced by a lust of money, to be under the control of bad advisers, to have the notions of a government hateful to the Assamese and to be attached to the odious system of Pyke that under him no really efficient reorganisation of the government can take place, I cannot but concur with the opinion of the President, that as the treaty has not been strictly observed, so also its proper objects have remained entirely unaccomplished,
 (3)
 that we are bound to take the administration of the whole country."

(1) "Under circumstances explained by Captain Jenkins," Robertson, then a member of the Supreme Council observed, "so far from feeling surprised at his ultimate failure, that it strikes me that the Raja had been able to hold on so long as he had done." (I.P.C. 10 Oct. 1838, No. 86).

(2) I.P.C. 16 May, 1838, No. 54.

(3) I.P.C. 22 Aug., 1838, No. 7; Minute by Lord Auckland.

The Resumption - On 22 August, 1838, the Supreme Government resolved on the resumption. ⁽¹⁾ Under instructions from the

Agent, Major White proceeded to Jorhat and on 16 September, 1838, after announcing the change by a proclamation, assumed the charge of the country. ⁽²⁾ The Raja himself submitted to

the inevitable with a protest, that no opportunity was given to him to defend himself against the charges made against him. ⁽³⁾ A number of petitions was presented in favour of his

restoration, which represented, as White said "the feelings of the upper and middle classes" ⁽⁴⁾ although Jenkins' impression was, that these were procured by the Raja for the occasion. ⁽⁵⁾

The representations made no change in the action of the Government. A personal allowance of Rs.1000 was granted to Purandar Singh, which till the end of his life he refused to accept, while separate provision was made for the members of his family. ⁽⁶⁾

The experiment thus came to an end and with it also a dynasty that had ruled for six centuries. It clearly showed that responsibility without sovereignty was fraught with evil. Perhaps direct and decisive intervention would have saved the the ryots from being the victims of the experiment. The transactions also revealed the apathy, inaction and indecision of

(1) I.P.C. 22 Aug. 1838, No. 11; vide the Resolution of the Government.

(2) I.P.C. 10 Oct., 1838, Nos. 83 and 85.

(3) Ibid.

(4) I.P.C. 31 Oct., 1838, No. 96; White to Jenkins.

(5) I.P.C. 31 Oct. 1838, No. 96; Jenkins to the Government of Bengal.

(6) I.P.C. 10 Oct. 1838, No. 87.

the Supreme Government. "Formally to set up a native ruler" Lord Auckland had confessed with regret, "and within a few years to remove him, must be measures I need not say of bad general effect and the impression produced in the province either of our want of accurate means of finding the most just and expedient plans of policy or of our irresolution and inconsistency in acting in our plans."⁽¹⁾

It may be argued that Captain Jenkins was responsible for the misfortunes of Purandar, but in reality the nobility were too much divided with conflicting interests and deep-rooted rivalries for the Raja to achieve success. He plunged headlong into their strife and could not extricate himself from it.⁽²⁾ Purandar also failed to see that there was a new awakening among the people. With an unbounded confidence in the "Raij", the 'esprit de corps', they had lost all faith in their monarchs, who had been truants in regard to their lives, during the period

(1) I.P.C. 22 Aug. 1838, No. 7. Minute by Lord Auckland;
(I have quoted the passage verbatim from the document.

(2) Favouring restoration, in a representation, the three grandees of the realm wrote to the Government, "There having been three different claimants of the Raj within 20 years much party spirit divided the country and prevented the due administration of it during the temporary rule of the Burmese and the English a few officials of low origin puffed up with their wealth had accustomed themselves to (look) down upon the noble and respectable of the land, but their spirit being checked under the Raja's rule they had perfidiously combined to displace him and preferring false accusations had succeeded in their object."
(I.P.C. 31 Oct., 1838, No. 96. White to Jenkins).

of anarchy and confusion. Their utter indifference to the incipient movements for restoration and even to the restoration of Purandar clearly indicated, that monarchy as such had no charm for them. In his endeavour to conciliate his struggling followers he had to perpetuate by force a system which brought ruin to himself and no less on his subjects. ⁽¹⁾ He backed the wrong horse. Had he championed the cause of the commonalty or his community alone, perhaps the rule of the Ahoms could have continued for a few more generations. He was indeed a victim of circumstances and no less of his own folly.

The resumed territories were formed into two new districts under Lieuts. Brodie and Vetch with headquarters at Jorhat and Lakhimpur. ⁽²⁾ The oppressive duties on bhats, ghats and fisheries were immediately abolished ⁽³⁾ and steps were taken

(1) Undoubtedly people were not inclined to make payment in money, but they were still less agreeable with changing circumstances to prefer servitude. Since the beginning of British rule, there had been universal complaints of the non-attendance of the 'Lixos' attached to the nobles and other functionaries of the state. Even Neufville found it extremely difficult to procure 100 pykes required for Ex-Raja Chandra Kanta and also workmen for public buildings upon a premium of Re.1/- in addition to their exemption from taxation. After the abolition of the Khel system in Lower Assam, the services of the pykes had naturally to be maintained in the other part of the provinces by force. There was thus every possibility as Jenkins reported that they, at the moment the Government resumed possession of the country, would desert their master everywhere.
(I.P.C. 6 Mar. 1839, No. 143; 10 June 1831 No. 58; Neufville to Scott).

(2) I.P.C. 14 Nov. 1838, Nos. 58-9; 5 Dec. 1838, Nos. 137-40.

(3) I.P.C. 21 Nov. 1838, No. 114.

under Mr Thornton to survey the whole territory. (1) The next year saw the end of the capitation tax and the burden of revenue was thrown entirely on land. (2) The attention of the Government was devoted, during the years following resumption, not so much to an immediate increase in the rent-roll as to the amelioration of the condition of the ryots and winning their confidence. It was obvious to the Government, that Upper Assam was destined to be one of the most valuable appanages of the British dominion.

"In soil there are few parts of India to compare with Upper Assam and its vegetable and mineral products - natural and cultivated promise to be spectacular, such returns as must ensure the ultimate prosperity and populousness of the tracts as soon as the relations with the Burmese and with the existing uncivilized tribes on its borders shall have been so settled as to ensure its permanent tranquility." (3)

(1) I.P.C. 22 Dec. 1838, No. 115.

(2) B.R.C. 11 Aug. 1840, Nos. 28-30.

(3) I.P.C. 1839, No. 144.

THE ANNEXATION OF CACHAR AND JAYANTEA

1. CACHAR (1832)

Raja Gobinda Chandra - Nine years before the political experiment in Upper Assam, Raja Gobinda Chandra was likewise reinstated in his paternal possessions in Cachar on agreement to pay a tribute of Rs. 10,000. ⁽¹⁾ He has been described as "a man of weak character and pacific disposition" but "tyrannical and avaricious." ⁽²⁾ Although his subjects were in a state of destitution, Pemberton says "the resumption of the government of his country was immediately followed by a series of most unsparing exactions from the unfortunate ryots of the country and four years after the restoration of his throne very little improvement was perceptible." ⁽³⁾ Actually, the country was so much devastated by the depredations of the Burmese and the Manipuri adventurers that the Raja was constrained to resort to all possible expedients ⁽⁴⁾ to raise a revenue; yet for the first

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- (1) Aitchison, Treaties and Engagements, p. 117.
(2) Fisher, Memoir of the countries on and near the Eastern frontier of Sythet; See Wilson's Documents, Appendix, p. 28.
(3) Pemberton, Report of the Eastern Frontier, p. 183.
(4) B.S.P.C. 30 May, 1829, No. 2; B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 106. The sum due from the defaulters was recovered by distraint on property, confinement and in the case of desertions by a collective fine on the pargana to which they belonged. Customs were levied on every exportable article, collected at the river ghats, which were farmed out to the highest bidders. The Raja had the monopoly of the grain market and articles such as ivory, wax, and silk were considered as contraband; as anyone bringing them into Cachar must sell to him, who fixed his own price to be retailed at a profit. Besides arbitrary demands were made for playing music at marriages and festivals, riding in a dolie (palanquin), wearing gold ornaments, etc.

two years he could but partially fulfil his engagements.

His rule was unpopular if not oppressive. To conduct efficiently his administration under British suzerainty, he had to reorganize the whole revenue and judicial departments by recruiting a host of officials from Bengal. Few of the Kacharees could either read or write their own or other languages, hence there was a dearth of officials capable of conducting the new administrative details; in consequence their services were dispensed with ^{with} the exception of the 'Barbhandari', the Prime Minister and a few personal guards of the Raja. ⁽²⁻³⁾ Personally, having married a Manipuri princess, he showed a marked favouritism towards a number of Manipuris. ⁽³⁾ He thus acted in direct contravention of the established customs of the Kacharees, by which the Raja and his ministers should be selected by a council of forty, alias 'Forty Sempungs' and with whom alone he could have matrimonial connections. ⁽⁴⁾

(1) B.S.P.C. 23 Nov. 1828, Nos. 42-44.

(2) B.P.C. 9 Apr. 1832, No. 44; Fisher to Cracroft 20 Sept. '30; B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 100; 12 Nov. 1832, No. 46.

(3) B.P.C. 29 Oct. 1832, No. 142.

(4) Fisher reported that these "Forty Sempungs" were not so many nobles but included the whole body of Kacharees who were divided into so many tribes. They were however at liberty to intermarry and were not separated by any distinction of caste. All however agreed that the prince should be chosen from the Sempung called the 'Hassoncha Tribe.' B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 100.

The simple-minded Kacharees considered his innovations shocking and diametrically opposed to their interests. In utter disgust many emigrated to the neighbouring districts while a section of the older Kacharees set up an independent principality of their own in central Cachar. ⁽¹⁾

The Raja was in effect protected by British bayonets. As the Government disclaimed all right of interference in private affairs except in extreme cases, there was practically no check upon his power to misgovern his subjects. The worst features of the alleged tyranny of Gobinda Chandra, however, fell rather on ⁽²⁾ 'individuals' who opposed him than on the community as a whole. Such an individual was his rival and arch enemy Tularam.

Rise of Tularam - Son of Kacha Dau, a petty officer under the former Raja, Tularam asserted his independence soon after the accession of Raja Gobinda Chandra. Like his prototype in Muttock, he had taken full advantage of the anarchical condition after the invasions and had established himself firmly in the hills north of Cachar. After the restoration, this redoubtable chief with a band of followers successfully maintained himself against the repeated but ineffectual attempts made by the Raja of Cachar to dislodge him. ⁽³⁾ Gobinda Chandra treated him as a usurper, while Tularam aspiring even to the rule of Cachar, declared that the Raja had forfeited his claim over the Kacharees by his tyranny

(1) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 82; Arzee (Petition) of the Forty Sempungs.

(2) Ibid; Tularam to Tucker, the magistrate of Sy/phet.

(3) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, Nos. 82, 104 and 112.

(1)
and disregard of established customs. A bitter feud, therefore, raged between the two.

In 1828, feeling himself infirm and old, Tularam entrusted the command of his followers to his cousin Gobinda Ram. The latter, though he owed everything to his uncle who had reared him from infancy, proved a traitor and compelled Tularam to take refuge for a while in Jayantea. Tularam soon recovered his possessions with the aid of a party of troops sent by Gambhir Sing, the Raja of Manipur, and drove his ungrateful cousin to take shelter at Dharampur under Gobinda Chandra. (2)
In July 1829, through the mediation of Scott the independence of Tularam was recognized by the Raja of Cachar who bound himself not to disturb the chief within the limits of his hills. (3)

The Question of Succession - A compromise was thus effected with Tularam. Everyone, however, knew that a quarrel was sure to ensue immediately after the death of Raja Gobinda Chandra, as the blessing of an heir had been denied to him. In anticipation of such trouble, the Government of Bengal sounded the Raja through the Commissioner of Sylhet on the expediency of transferring Cachar to the British Government after his demise and even hinted that on his agreeing to such an arrangement, the Government might be induced to relinquish the annual tribute

(1) B.S.P.C. 30 May, 1829, No. 2; Tucker to Swinton, 18 Feb. '29.

(2) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, Nos. 104 and 112.

(3) B.S.P.C. 3 July, 1829, No. 7.

(1)
payable by him.

The Government had hitherto been entirely averse to the extension of British influence in that direction. But it was now felt that under existing circumstances Cachar was simply 'vast wastes' and presented no 'insurmountable' difficulties to an invading force coming through Manipur. Only a few years earlier it had effectively paralysed the advance of the British forces operating against the Burmese. Under British management, with her fertile plains and forest products, it was hoped, Cachar would become the granary of the surrounding regions and would facilitate the provision of assistance to Manipur, which was the formidable barrier against the Burmese in that quarter. (2)

The Raja of Cachar, encircled as he was by a host of enemies, could not even venture to discuss the proposal nor was he willing to give up the payment of tribute which he felt to be the only security for the retention of his power. (3) Later, the Government also realised that as long as the question of the succession was left open and unsettled the claimants would be restrained and kept quiet. They were likely to disturb the peace if the door to their future hopes were finally shut against them. (4) The proposal was in consequence dropped.

(1) B.S.P.C. 23 Nov. 1828, No. 44; 30 May, 1829, No. 2; Tucker to Swinton, 18 Feb. '29.

(2) B.S.P.C. 30 May, 1829, No. 6.

(3) Ibid. No. 2;

(4) Ibid. No. 6.

The Murder of the Raja - Circumstances, however, unexpectedly favoured the annexation of Cachar. On 24 April, 1830, Raja Gobinda Chandra was murdered by a gang of Manipuries in collusion with some of the attendants of the palace. The Ranees with their family idols fled into the Company's territory.⁽¹⁾ A detachment of troops was immediately posted

in Cachar, and, pending a decision, the district was placed under Lieut. Fisher, who was then on Survey duties at Syphet,⁽²⁾ with the powers of a magistrate and collector.

It was strongly suspected that the atrocity had been committed at the instance of Tularam and mainly under the orders of Gambhir Sing, the Raja of Manipur, who had been aspiring to the possessions of Cachar.⁽³⁾ It was assumed that the fact, that the late Raja had taken preparatory steps for the adoption of a child shortly before his death might have hastened the tragedy. There had also been continued and repeated disputes between the two chiefs over several matters and only about a fortnight before the occurrence, the Raja of Cachar had requested the aid of the Government against Gambhir Sing, who was alleged to have sent a force to take possession of the country in concert with Tularam.⁽⁴⁾

Evidence was, however, conflicting. There had been a

(1) B.P.C. 14 May, 1830, No. 38; Furquand to the Secretary, Government of Bengal.

(2) B.P.C. 18 June, 1830, No. 62.

(3) B.P.C. 14 May, 1830, No. 38; 9 Apr. 1832, No. 44.

(4) B.P.C. 28 May, 1830, No. 84.

deliberate attempt in some other quarters to fix the guilt of the crime on the Raja of Manipur.⁽¹⁾ On the other hand "the existence of domestic conspiracy is more certain" as Fisher subsequently reported,⁽²⁾ "than was at first supposed." Though the murder was committed by the followers of Gambhir Sing and perhaps by his orders, the conduct of a considerable number of Kacharees holding positions in the Raja's family, was also extremely suspicious; of course there was no direct proof of their participation in the crime.

The decision - To the rule of Cachar there were now two actual claimants - Ranee Indraprava, the eldest queen of the late Raja and Tularam - while the forty Sempungs also claimed the right to select the new Raja from among their own number.⁽³⁾ The right of this body was considered dubious; even if it had ever existed, it was now obsolete. Its revival was unlikely to be attended with any benefit; on the contrary it was feared that it might become a source of constant strife, if not of civil war.⁽⁴⁾

(1) B.P.C. 18 June, 1830, No. 62.

(2) B.P.C. 9 Apr. 1832, No. 44; Fisher to Scott.

(3) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, Nos. 98-100.

(4) Ibid; It appears from Fisher's report, that the only instance of a 'fair and free election' by the Sempungs occurred a century and a half before, on the death of Tamradhaj, the fourth ruler of the dynasty, when Chandraprava, the widow of the late ruler in conjunction with the Sempungs elected Kirtichandra to the vacant throne.

Scott half-heartedly supported the claim of the queen, but Fisher dismissed it as inconsistent with both the general practice of the Hindus and Kacharee customs. (1) Tularam, who was (2) looked down upon by the Bengalees on account of his low origin, was supposed to have been implicated in the murder of the late Raja. No consideration was therefore shown to his petition, on the grounds that it was vested "on favour and expediency" (3) alone.

Two courses were now left open - either to annex Cachar or to make it over to Gambhir Sing, who had offered to farm it for Rs. 15,000 a year. Captain Grant, the Political Agent in Manipur advocated the former; strong arguments were, however, urged against that arrangement by Fisher and other officers. (4) (5) "It is better to assume (Cachar) openly and immediately" Cracroft, the officiating Agent remarked, "than to wait till it be further reduced by letting the Raja rack it for a paltry sum of 15,000 per annum." "It would be better," he went so far as to say, "to make him a present of 15,000 than to admit him." (6) Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General, personally was reluctant to permit Gambhir to profit

(1) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 100.

(2) He was supposed to be the son of Kasta Dau and Ratna Mala (Mulea?), a Manipuri slave girl.

(3) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 100

(4) (5) P.L.I.B. 29 Aug. 1832, No. 5.

(6) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 98.

by a crime which he presumed to have been committed at his instigation. ⁽¹⁾ After lengthy discussions extending over a period of two years, the strong and almost unanimous objections of all officers reinforced by the unwillingness of the people to be handed over to Manipur decided the Supreme Government to resolve on annexation. ⁽²⁾

Administrative Arrangements - By a proclamation of 12 August, 1832, the plains of Cachar were brought under the direct control of the Government of Bengal. ⁽³⁾ The pargana of Dharampur, being separated from the lowlands of Cachar by a wide range of hills, was attached to Lower Assam. The remaining portion - now divided into North and South Cachar - was placed under Fisher, as Assistant to the Agent with headquarters at Dudputlee, a few miles east of Badarpur. ⁽⁴⁾

Cachar thus became a component part of the British dominion, but it was so full of ^(jungle) ~~waste-land~~ and so thinly populated that it could hardly meet the cost of its establishments. ⁽⁵⁾ It was

(1) B.P.C. 9 Apr. 1832, No. 56; See also Chakravarti, B.P. "Annexation of Cachar, 1832", Indian Historical Record Commission, 1942. ^{Pras.}

(2) B. P. C. 9 July, 1832, No. 17

(3) B.P.C. 17 Sept. 1832, No. 136.

(4) P.L.I.B. 16 Jan. 1834, No. 2.

(5) See Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of British India, Table 3. The receipts and disbursements of the district since the management of Lieut. Fisher stood as follows:-

	<u>Receipts.</u>	<u>Charges</u>
1830-31	30,595	28,418
1831-32	32,429	31,450

immediately realised, that without the influx of immigrants no improvement could be effected. The people of Sylhet evinced little disposition to emigrate into Cachar while the hill tribes were too poor to do so. Every encouragement was therefore held out to populous districts of Bengal - Dacca, Tipperah, Mymensing, with promises of adequate remuneration and security to induce native capitalists to seek their fortunes in a country, which
(1)
was extremely fertile.

Fisher introduced the Jury system for the trial of
(2)
criminal cases. Civil cases, however, presented a task of extreme difficulty, since, although the scanty population it comprised a wide variety of races - Kacharees, Nagas, Manipuris, Kukis, immigrant Muslims, Bengalees and Assamese, each with its own peculiar customs and usages. Suits had previously been decided in a summary way by the ministers under the direction of the

(1) B.P.C. 12 Nov., 1832, No. 46; Fisher to the Agent. Thus, circular letters were issued through the respective district officers to the effect, that the country of Cachar had been permanently annexed to the British dominion; that the tax there would be regulated upon similar principles as existed in other possessions of the Company; that they might get good jungle lands rent free for 1000 days at the end of which a settlement would be concluded for the portion brought under cultivation, to which the holder would acquire a proprietary right as a zaminder; that when an outlay was made for draining or filling marshes, clearing forests, the period during which the land would be allowed to remain rent-free would be extended to five years, etc.

(2) B.P.C. 12 Nov. 1832, No. 46.

(1) Raja. They were now investigated by reference to Hindu and Muhammedan laws with such variations as could be ascertained from assessors or intelligent persons. The aim, however, was gradually to introduce the system prevailing in the adjacent districts of Bengal. (2)

Treaty with Tularam - Tularam was confirmed in his possessions; the boundary of his principality was, however, not defined. (3) In September 1832, less than a month later, entering Dharampur he plundered and burnt several villages and carried off two individuals, both of whom he subsequently put to death. (4) This atrocity was committed in retaliation for a previous attack upon him by Gobinda Ram, who held the pargana where it took place. Tularam's life was now at stake, and in any case it was highly probable that he might forfeit the tract. Luckily for him, in the trial that was held at Gauhati he secured an acquittal, on the grounds that he was not amenable then to British jurisdiction. (5) Thereupon, with a view to obviate a further collision Jenkins entered into an engagement with Tularam in October 1834, whereby (6) he resigned the western portion of his territory, then in charge

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) B.P.C. 12 Sept., 1832, No. 136.

(4) B.P.C. 29 Oct. 1832, No. 132.

(5) B.P.C. 31 May, 1834, No. 22.

(6) B.P.C. 16 Oct., 1834, Nos. 52-4; 3 Dec. No.s 6-8.

of his cousin, to the British Government in lieu of a pension of rupees fifty per month, retaining the tract bounded by the Naga Hills and the rivers Dhansiri, Jamuna and the Dayang.⁽¹⁾

Kala Nagas ceded to Manipur - Controversy remained over the portion of hilly tract lying between the rivers Jeeree and Barak. It was in the occupation of Gambhir Sing and inhabited by the Atlungha(?) and Naungshee tribes alias the 'Kala Nagas'. Personal service was the principal tribute exacted from these people by the Raja in the form of the conveyance of the military stores and the produce of the country from village to village. This thinly inhabited Naga territory was in fact indispensable to the Raja of Manipur, as it was also to the Timber merchants, for without their aid the valuable products of the region could not be carried over to the eager customers.

(2) (3)

Both Jenkins and Fisher⁽²⁾ opposed the cession of the tract to Manipur. Pemberton⁽³⁾ on the other hand recommended the expediency of leaving the control of the turbulent Nagas to the Raja. With the concurrence of the Government of Bengal,⁽⁴⁾ the Supreme Government thought it impolitic to impair the good

(1) Aitchison, Treaties and Engagements, pp. 139-140.

(2) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, Nos. 109-11.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) B.P.C. 9 July, 1832, No. 17.

feelings of Manipur Raj, who had established a claim by his "unquestioned occupation" since the Burmese war. In November 1832, the tract was ceded to Manipur. (1)

Actually, the authority of Manipur Raja was far from being established over the Nagas, who, as Jenkins reported, were on the point of revolting against the exacting demands of Manipur. The claim of Gambhir was, after all, by an act of usurpation "and the same reasons" as the Court rightly observed, "which existed against granting to him the whole of Cachar were proportionately strong against the cession of a part." (2)

Changed Policy towards Manipur - This favour was, however, neutralized in the following year by requiring Gambhir Sing to surrender to the Burmese the Kabaw valley, which was also under his occupation over a long period. (3)

(1) B.P.C. 5 Nov. 1832, Nos. 7-8.

(2) C.D. 3 Dec. 1834, No. 14, para 67

(3) B.S.P.C. 16 Apr. 1833, No. 18. At the beginning, the Governor General in Council supported the claim of Gambhir Sing. Subsequent persuasion by Burney, the British Resident at the court of Ava, who pointed out that the valley had been in the possession of the Burmese since 1370, influenced the Government of India to decide the issue ultimately in favour of the king of Ava, compensating the Raja of Manipur with a monthly stipend of Rs. 500. (For details see Desai, W.S: History of British Residency in Burma, 1826-40, pp. 199-222.

It was about this time, that the surveys of the Eastern frontier by Jenkins and Pemberton revealed the true state of affairs in Manipur. Even after uninterrupted peace for seven years the land was reported to be desolate and exhausted. Its population did not exceed 50,000 souls and its revenue 5,000 rupees. The situation of Manipur, surrounded by mountains excluded it from the advantages of extensive commercial traffic. (1) In the event of a rupture with Ava, it was obviously futile to rely on Manipur nor could she afford even the supply of troops that would be required. Above all, Pemberton revealed the comparative strategic insignificance of the country. He thought that for an advance against the capital of Ava, it could not present such facilities nor such a probability of success as the An route from Arakan, which was shorter, less mountainous and circuitous than the Manipur route. (2) In consequence of these revelations, there was a definite turn in the Manipurian policy of the British Government. In February 1835, it was decided to abolish British superintendence over the Manipur levy; in future its maintenance was left to the option of the Manipur government. (3) In the following April, Major Grant was removed. But to preserve friendly intercourse, in case of future emergency, Lieut. Gordon was posted there to act in the capacity of a Political Agent. (4) (5) (as the channel of communication).

(1) Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of British India, pp. 146-51.

(2) Ibid. In the second Anglo-Burmese war 1852, an attempt was made to use the AN pass, but the Manipur route was not even considered.

(3) B. P. C. 11 Feb. 1835 no 101

(4) B. P. C. 6 Apr. 1835 no 1

(5) B. P. C. 11 Feb. 1835 nos 102-6

II. Annexation of Jayantea (1835)

That early British relations with the petty states in the north-east frontier were formed rather hurriedly is evident from the altered policy towards Manipur. In 1824, the Burmese menace was the most absorbing interest; how to keep the enemy away from the British frontier - that was the sole factor that determined the relations with the neighbouring states. British intervention in their affairs had been actuated not so much by the desire to establish permanent rights as by that of preventing them from becoming a base of operations against British possessions.

Attempt at the revision of the Treaty - As regards the relations with Jayantea, it was a somewhat different matter. Scott had an exaggerated notion of its potentialities. Under the impression that the people were warlike since their lands were held by military tenure, he had stipulated that the Raja of Jayantea should render military assistance to the British forces in their advance against the Burmese. His was therefore "an alliance of friendship and amity" rather than an agreement with an ordinary dependent state, paying tribute. He was soon disillusioned. In the war against Ava, it had been found that the Raja could not substantially aid the British troops nor was his assistance

(1) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 117; Private letter, Fisher to Jenkins, 16 Apr. '32.

(2) Aitchison, Treaties and Engagements, p. 118-19.

against the insurgent Khasias up to the expectations of the Government. The people of Jayantea proved timid and unwarlike,⁽¹⁾ but as the Raja held in addition two fine tracts on either side of the hills - populous, well cultivated and capable of yielding a revenue estimated at not less than a lakh and a half, it was presumed that he might easily maintain four or five companies of Sepoys under a European officer or pay a subsidy equivalent to the cost of maintaining such a body of troops.⁽²⁾ Eight years later, when Jenkins was engaged on his survey of the Eastern frontier, Lister, the officer in charge of the Khasia Hills observed that⁽³⁾ "it is the only one of the petty states which in this quarter has enjoyed an uninterrupted tranquility for the last sixty years: It must be admitted that we have made a very unsatisfactory bargain in accepting a military service in place of tribute and that the sooner we amend that part of our treaty the better."⁽⁵⁾

An opportunity to revise the treaty soon presented itself in Sept. 1832, ^{on} in the death of Ram Sing, the ruler of Jayantea. He was succeeded by his nephew Rajendra Sing, then a boy of fifteen.⁽⁴⁾ An attempt was made by Robertson to impose a tribute on the new ruler in recognition of his title by the

(1) B.P.C. 14 May, 1832, No. 17; Private letter, Fisher to Jenkins.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) B.P.C. 6 Nov. 1832, No. 56.

British Government. The Raja was invited to an interview held at Sylhet. (1) After justifying the right of the Government to the tribute Robertson pressed him for the amendment of the existing treaty. He was given the option of ceding a portion of the plains in lieu of tribute. Rajen was perplexed: he was afraid to concede any of the innovations thus proposed in the presence of his ^Hministers who were also present at the meeting. When every other argument failed to bring him to a decision, he was informed that until and unless he came to terms he would be treated by the British Government as the 'Jammadar' not the Raja of Jayantea. (2)

Treaty unfair and inexpedient - It cannot be denied that the timely presence of the British forces had once saved Jayantea from being overrun by the Burmese invaders. Though, indirectly, she had since enjoyed the 'full and ample benefits' of British protection, it would be impolitic therefore on her part to take advantage of a treaty made in an hour of emergency, all the more so, when her neighbours, on having similar advantages, had contributed their share to the expense of the defence of the frontier. Perhaps no better arrangement was possible than an attempt, as was done later in the case of the Moamaria chief, at the commutation of his existing military service for a payment in money.

(1) B.P.C. 13 June, 1832, No. 83.

(2) Ibid.

It was, however, manifestly unfair to make a heavy demand of Rs. 10,000 by a simple declaration that the treaty had become void through the death of the individual with whom it was contracted. "If there were no document" as the Directors rightly observed ⁽¹⁾ "to show that the Jayanteeah treaty was meant as a personal engagement liable to remission on the death of the Raja, we see no reason to assume that we are at liberty to consider it annulled by that event." Apart from the question of legality it was inexpedient. The data ⁽²⁾ on which Robertson based his assessment were erroneous. He ignored the fact that the bulk of the revenue in the state derived from personal service and produce and only a limited amount in cash. Nor was it within the competence of the boy-king to change abruptly the established customs of his country without the fear of being deposed, if not the loss of his own life. The Raja was in fact,

(1) C.D. 3 Dec. 1833, No. 14, para 94

(2) B.P.C. 13 June, 1833, No. 83; 25 Mar. 1834, No. 40; 30 Mar. 1835, No. 17; Robertson reported: "Judging from the number of his retinue and general style of his suwaree which surpassed anything that I have ever witnessed even in Hindoostan, excepting at Lucknow, there cannot in my opinion be any doubt that the Raja could very well afford double the sum required of him." This evidently shows the nature of Robertson's data, on which he based the assessment. He presumed that the revenue of the state would be about a lakh and a half, but subsequent reports from the local authorities showed that the receipt in money could not exceed Rs. 30,000.

the mere head of a confederacy of hill chiefs. He could not entertain any negotiations nor could he bind himself to conditions without the previous approval of the heads of the other hill states unless the British Government would support him in over-⁽¹⁾throwing the old system.

Quarrel between Nurtung and Jowai - Actually, from the very outset, the position of Rajendra Sing was far from secure. In the Durbar, consisting of the Ministers of the component States, there had been a long-standing quarrel between the members of Jowai and Nurtung, the two neighbouring states.⁽²⁾ The former, taking advantage of their relations with the present Raja, were actually in power and exerted an undue influence in the state, not infrequently to the detriment of the interests of their rivals. Such conduct inevitably made the people of Nurtung vindictive. Robertson's interference in the affairs of Jayantea and especially the non-recognition of the Raja naturally gave them a hope and even emboldened them to depose Rajendra Sing, against whom they alleged injustice under the domination of the clique from Jowai.⁽³⁾

(1) Lieut. Inglis, the officer later deputed to Jayantea, wrote to Jenkins: "If he did consent, a rebellion would be the only consequence and that even if we assist him to suppress it and carry the point, he could not exist comfortably being convinced that many plans would be on foot to assassinate him. That such a thing was never demanded from his subjects and happen what may, he would not, rather could not be the first to introduce it." B.P.C. 8 May, 1834, No. 62; Private letter Inglis to Jenkins; 6 Feb. 1834, No. 141; Rajendra Sing to the Governor General of India.

(2) B.P.C. 8 May, 1834, No. 62; Private letter, Inglis to Jenkins.

(3) B.P.C. 13 Apr. 1834; No. 135.

Seizure of British Subjects for Sacrifice - In Aug. 1832, just a few months before the death of Ram Sing, an unfortunate incident occurred. Four British subjects were seized at Gobha; three of them were later sacrificed to the goddess 'Kali', one, however, escaped. ⁽¹⁾ The abhorrence of the British Government to human sacrifice had been made known to the Raja of Jayantea on several occasions before and he had been warned to prevent such practices in the neighbourhood of British territories. ⁽²⁾ On a demand for enquiry by the Agent, the previous Raja had immediately arrested the chief of Gobha and forced him to take necessary action against the offenders. ⁽³⁾ After his death a reminder was served on his successor. The serious attention of the Government was, however, not drawn to the incident until the middle of 1833. Following a deposition made by the Dalais (Headmen) of Nurtung, who approached the Government with their own grievances, Robertson came to the conclusion that Rajendra Sing, who was reported to be a "promoter of this inhuman rite" had committed the atrocity in collaboration with the Raja of Gobha. ⁽⁴⁾ He therefore urged the Government to call upon the present ruler of Jayantea to immediately deliver up that chief and other perpetrators under penalty of losing his

(1) B.P.C. 12 Dec., 1833; No. 70.

(2) Pemberton, *Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 211; B.P.C. 19 Mar., 1832, Nos. 79-80.

(3) B.P.C. 12 Dec. 1833; No. 70.

(4) Ibid.

throne for failure to comply. The Government of Bengal was not disposed to act so hurriedly without further investigation. The Agent was instructed to repeat the demand for the surrender of the culprits. In the event of the Raja's non-compliance or indifference to arrest and punish the criminals he was to be deemed guilty of the crime and to be dealt with accordingly. (1)

In the meantime Robertson had left Assam. Soon after the arrival of Jenkins at Cherrapunji, a deputation of several leading men of Jayantea waited upon him. They represented the willingness of the Raja to apprehend the persons concerned in the sacrifice, but said that he was unable to do so at present on account of the resistance of the chiefs of Nurtung. (2) Imploring justice, the Raja also wrote to Jenkins:

"My country is very small. No ryot pays revenue in cash and I cannot alter the old customs. By the former Treaty my grandfather was to have some lands in Assam when that country should be conquered. This has not yet been given. On the contrary my quiet country is put in trouble and my subjects in agitation. My hope is in your justice." (3)

(1) Ibid. No. 72.

(2) B.P.C. 10 Apr. 1834, No. 135: They did not even hesitate to state, that "this inability was chiefly the result of British policy towards the Raja in withholding the recognition of his title, which had encouraged the chiefs to defy his authority and was producing anarchy throughout the country."

(3) B.P.C. 10 Apr. 1834, No. 136; Rajendra Sing to the Agent.

Investigation under Jenkins - Reviewing the whole case Jenkins found himself at a loss. He doubted greatly the propriety of considering the former treaty as having lapsed or of demanding a tribute, which he felt "must be abandoned".⁽¹⁾ He also realised the difficulties of the Raja in face of the enmity of Nurtung in handing over the 'perpetrators'. "It is almost certain to my mind" he reported "that the Raja had not the power to enforce them (the demands of Government); the Gobha Raja, the person apparently most implicated having sided with the Nurtung people, who have notoriously set at naught the Raja's authority."⁽²⁾ About this time, the mutual aggressions by the conflicting parties had reached their climax. Not only had murders and atrocities become affairs of common occurrence, but their activities had affected the bordering chiefs and some of them had already been drawn into the rival camps. Considering the situation very serious, Jenkins lost no time in deputing Lieut. Inglis, an officer of the Syphet Light Infantry, to reconcile the disputing parties.⁽³⁾ Subsequently he attempted to hold a thorough investigation of the case against the Raja of Jayantea.⁽⁴⁾ The evidence he found was extremely meagre and unreliable. All that he could procure from the depositions was:-

(1) B.P.C. 8 May, 1834, No. 61: Private letter, Jenkins to Trevelyan.

(2) B.P.C. 10 Apr., 1834, No. 135.

(3) B.P.C. 15 May, 1834, No. 77.

(4) B.P.C. 23 Feb. 1835, No. 3.

" During the lifetime of the late Raja Ram Sing one of the family of the present Raja - the suspicion being that he was the person, according to the custom of his family and country gave orders to offer up human sacrifice to the Raja or other headmen of Gobha. In compliance with these orders four individuals were seized in passing through Gobha to Nowgong, who were British subjects. Three of them were sacrificed and one escaped by which circumstance the atrocity became known. On a demand for enquiry by the Governor General's Agent the then Raja of Gobha Chatter Sing and others were arrested and sent to Jynteapurn, but the late Raja dying just at the time, the present Raja released him and afterwards deposed him probably on other accounts than his concern in these sacrifices." (1)

The result

The result of the enquiry could not legally convict anyone said to have been concerned in the atrocity. Without committing himself to anything for final decision, Jenkins submitted the proceedings to the Government of Bengal. (2) "Should the Government consider the fact of the sacrifice established and that the privity to the crime by the present Raja as sufficiently proved to justify his deposition," the Agent recommended "instead of setting up another chief, the country should be dismembered" (3) and the low tracts on both sides of the hills should be attached.

Annexation of Jayantea - The Government of Bengal considered the case as "sufficiently proved" to justify the deposition of the Raja. Feeling, however, it was inexpedient to have recourse to such an extreme measure, (4) it was resolved on the suggestion of Jenkins to confiscate all his possessions in the lowlands. On

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) B.P.C. 23 Feb. 1835, No. 5.

15 March, 1835, the order was delivered to the Raja by Captain Lister, and on the following day Rajendra Sing resigned expressing his reluctance to exercise any rule over the possessions left to him.⁽¹⁾ He must have felt that with the barren possessions in the hills, he had not the resources to command any authority over the warring factions. He felt so insecure in their midst, that he requested the Government to allow him to retire to Sylhet. His desire was granted and an allowance of Rs. 500/- per month was given him for his support.⁽²⁾ The whole of the Jayantea territory in consequence passed under the direct control of the British Government.

To the people of Jayantea the introduction of British rule may have been a blessing. Nevertheless, its treatment of the Raja is open to question. The evidence of his guilt was insufficient and "somewhat suspicious"⁽³⁾ as coming mainly from enemies who had been endeavouring to ruin him. The release of Chatter Sing, the Raja of Gobha, was the only charge that could be brought against his conduct. If this was considered a deliberate attempt to screen an accomplice it might equally be argued that he was impelled by fear of vengeance of the

(1) B.P.C. 30 Mar. 1835, No. 17; Lister to the Government of Bengal, 15 Mar. & 18 Mar. 1835.

(2) B.P.C. 30 Mar. 1835, No. 24; 25 May, 1835, No. 2.

(3) B.P.C. 10 July, 1834, No. 219.

Dalais of Nurtung. Above all what the British considered a most inhuman rite was regarded in quite a different light by a people lagging several centuries behind in the march of civilization. "Treating with them" as Jenkins rightly observed "by ordinary rules towards more civilized states might be a mistaken policy for we could not be certain that the motives which guided us were appropriate."⁽¹⁾

III. Repercussions on the Home Government.

The adoption of so severe a measure against the ruler of Jayantea could not but attract the attention of the authorities in England. It was obvious to them, that the Raja neither refused nor decisively evaded compliance with the demand of the Government for the surrender of the culprits in such a way as to justify the sequestration of his whole territory.⁽²⁾ "The confiscation of his territory" the Directors observed in a despatch of 28 March, 1838 "has always appeared to us as a very summary measure and one of very doubtful propriety."⁽³⁾ As the annexation was already a 'fait accompli' the court could do no more than direct the Governor General to treat the "unfortunate chief" with "every reasonable indulgence" and to guard against over-

(1) Ibid.

(2) C.D. 14 Apr. 1836, No. 11, paras 1-5

(3) Ibid; 28 Mar., 1838, No. 18, para 22

assessment or the recurrence of other abuses, such as had resulted from the occupation of Assam. Simultaneously, for future guidance, the Governor General was informed that:-

"The confiscation of the territory of the native prince is an act, even when just and unavoidable involving such serious consequences that we desire you not on any future occasion to have recourse to so extreme a measure without a previous reference to our authority, making temporary arrangement in the meantime for the administration of any country, the management of which you may have found it necessary to assume, until you are in possession of our final decision."⁽¹⁾ It is evident that the Home authorities who could view Indian affairs from afar "at times pierced to the heart of a matter more quickly than the man on the spot."⁽²⁾ The despatch reached India just at the moment when the resumption of Upper Assam was under consideration. In the face of such a stricture, Lord Auckland hesitated to assume authority over the country but referred the decision to the discretion of the President-in-Council; the latter, however,⁽³⁾ ordered the immediate resumption of the territory. He did not conceive that the order of the Court was applicable to the case of Purandar Sing, but "referred to cases very different as that of Jyntea Raja in which the measure of confiscation was resolved

(1) Ibid, Para 24

(2) C.H. Philips: The East India Company, 1784-1834, p. 304.

(3) I.P.C. 22 Aug. 1838, No. 11. The Resolution of the Government of India; Extract from Political Dept., 8 Aug. 1838.

upon and executed as a penal sentence upon the Raja, for offences committed against British subjects and in which his own people had no claim for protection against the British Government."⁽¹⁾

The case of Jayantea might be stronger than that of Purandar Sing; yet the latter no less than the former came within the letter and spirit of the injunctions. "In confirming an order of a general nature," the Court observed, "to one particular class of cases and that class not the most frequent the President-in-Council had inadvisedly assumed the latitude of interpretation falling little short of license to depart altogether from our orders."⁽²⁾

It appears that the Directors were sincerely solicitous of giving the restored monarchy a fair trial, despite their opposition to the project at the very beginning. They felt that the Raja was placed under difficult circumstances. They also believed that the tribute was excessive.⁽³⁾ If the case were not already prejudiced by immediate assumption, the Court felt disposed to give Purandar another chance, either by reducing the tribute or by resuming a portion only of the territory in lieu of tribute. "We should have been desirous" they remarked "to give even a questionable measure a full trial before it was abandoned."⁽⁴⁾

(1) Ibid.

(2) C.D. 4 Dec. 1839, No. 24, para. 11

(3) C.D. 3 Dec. 1834, No. 14, para. 397

(4) C.D. 4 Dec. 1839, No. 24, paras. 14-15

The delays in the transaction of business and the difficulties in communication thus prevented important decisions of the Court from being carried into effect, and the Government of India was enabled to act even in contravention to the anticipated orders from the Home Government, with a knowledge that whatever might be the temper of the authorities in England, they could not reverse action already taken.

In reporting the annexation of Upper Assam, instead of being submissive, Lord Auckland expressed his great resentment at the recent multiplication of the restrictions upon his discretionary powers. (1) (2) In their reply, that such orders referred only to cases related to the native states and not to the security of India, the Directors attempted still to exert an influence. They could not, however, disguise the fact that the power to rule India must be seated in India and not in England. "The principal function of the Home Government is not to direct the details of the administration, but to scrutinize the past acts of the Indian Government, to lay down the principles and to issue a general instruction for their future guidance and to give and refuse sanction to great political measures which are referred home for approval." (3)

(1) P.L.I.B. 20 Aug. 1838, No. 18.

(2) G.D. 4 Dec. 1839, No. 24 paras. 18-19

(3) Vide Strachey, India - Its Administration and Progress, 1894, p. 52.
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CHAPTER SEVEN

 THE PROBLEMS OF THE FRONTIER - Period of Half-hearted Coercion
 (1834-38).

I. The Duel over the duars and blackmail.

The Pacification of the Khasias - The disturbance in the Khasia Hills terminated in March 1833 with the capture of Terrut Sing. The rebel chief was transported to Dacca, where he died the next year. Leaving a detachment of Sydnhet Light Infantry, troops were withdrawn from the hills and the district was then placed under the civil charge of Lieut. Townshend.⁽¹⁾ "We have shown the cossyas we have the power to punish" remarked Jenkins, "we shall now let them know that we are as willing as able to benefit them."⁽²⁾ To disarm their hostility Rajan Sing, the nephew of Terrut, was restored in 1834 to the rule of his uncle; a stipend of Rs.30 was granted to him, besides he was allowed the right of farming a district in the plains. A portion of Nungklow was awarded to Kala Raja, who had been loyal to the Government during the troubled period. Barmanik got back his possessions, on his agreeing to pay a heavy fine. The remaining chiefs were also left in their respective jurisdictions, but some of them were burdened with heavy obligations.⁽³⁾

The successful operations against the Khasias had results

(1) B.P.C. 22 May, 1834, No. 83.

(2) B.P.C. 8 May, 1834; Private letter Jenkins to Trevelyan.

(3) B.P.C. 22 May, 1834, Nos. 78 and 83; see also Mackenzie, North East Frontier of Bengal p. 225.

of far-reaching consequence. They stamped out all fear of aggression upon the fertile plains on either borders, as was evinced from the increase in cultivation in the tracts which had been deserted. ⁽¹⁾ The firm hold established in the hills removed the barriers in the line of communication between Assam and Sylhet and afforded a ready means of subduing, if necessary, the immediate neighbours, the Jayanteahs and the Garos. In short, instead of the expulsion of the British, the massacre at Nungklow confirmed their hold in a territory destined to be the centre of political life in the province.

Incidentally, the dangerous consequences of meddling with the affairs of a free and independent community were now resolved fully realised. It was by the Government to abstain from all interference in the affairs of these hill tribes unless impelled by "absolute necessity". Townshend was accordingly directed to confine his attention only to those cases which had a direct tendency to endanger the peace of the country or the paramountcy of their arrangements and with a view to avoiding hostilities as much as possible. Even in those cases he was instructed to

(1) In early 1834, it was reported by Robertson that in one of his recent tours from Assam to Sylhet, he was glad to find many villages already reconstructed, the people busily occupied in cultivating the valley near Myrong and Nungklow, hats re-established and frequented by travellers from the plains, traversing the road on which but a few months ago even armed detachments were liable to be waylaid and attacked.
B.P.C. 25 Mar. 1834, No. 38.

conduct the proceedings by way of "friendly mediation."

The Claims on the 'Duars' - The Court of Directors were deeply concerned at the bad news from Nungkhlow. That it was the symptom of the inevitable reaction of the chiefs against the authority of the British was obvious to them and therefore, the Court expressed their great anxiety to inquire whether any encroachment had actually been made on the ancient rights of the chiefs and to make amends for their losses. In the despatch of 3 December 1834, it was communicated to the Governor General that "Pecuniary advantages of some sort, which, whatever may have been their origin, customs had converted into rights, may since our establishment in Assam have been withheld from the hill chiefs and we desire that you will ascertain whether there are grounds for their suspicion and take measures for repairing their injuries, if any, shall appear to have been committed." (2) (2)

About this time, the restoration with the grant of unexpected privileges to Rajan Sing - the successor to the most inveterate and obstinate enemy of the British, - inspired the Khasias with fresh hopes. In October 1835, Chandmanik, who had succeeded Barmanik as the ruler of Khyrem made an appeal to the Government, claiming Demoria. It was held by his ancestors, he stated, ^{as} on a fief from the Assam Rajas, but was lost to them in 1825, with its occupation by the British Government. (3)

(1) B.P.C. 4 Sept. 1834, No. 57.

(2) C.D. 3 Dec. 1834, No. 14, para 96-103

(3) B.P.C. 24 Nov. 1835, Chandmanik to Jenkins, 14 Oct. '35.

We have already pointed out, that most of the Khasias lost the duars, which they held under the former government on account of their conversion to Hinduism, while some of them were deprived of their possessions in connection with their participation with the Burmese invaders or in the affair at Nungklow. Capt. Bogle, the officer in charge of Kamrup, opposed the restoration of the duars to the chiefs and also denied the right of Khyrem on the ground of the unbroken succession of the ruling family of Demorna. ⁽¹⁾ On the other hand Captain Jenkins ⁽²⁾ recognized that Chandmanik had a fair claim. He suggested that the ruler of Khyrem should be given half of Demorna, compensating the Raja with a grant of waste land rent free besides the exemption from all interference and vexatious demands of his paramount Hill Raj. He was also strongly inclined to favour the Khasias in the matter of the duars in "all practicable ways."

(1) I.P.C. 18 July, 1836, No. 88; Bogle to Jenkins, 7 June, '36.

(2) Ibid; In support of his recommendations Jenkins referred to certain extracts from the reports of Capt. Welsh. It was recorded that the Demorna Raja, in answer to Captain Welsh's summons to attend on Raja Gaurinath, excused himself from doing so on the grounds that he was tributary not only to the Assam Government but also to Khyrem and Jayantem Raja; although he agreed to do whatever the other Rajas of the duars consented to do.

In another extract the Demorna Raja informed the Captain "You have sent sepoys but as I am (unlike the Duranahag and Beltalah Rajah) at once a tributary to the Assam Government, the Khooram and Jayantem Raja I could not admit them to the interior part of my country."

Jenkins was therefore perfectly right to regard that the Khyrem Raja ought to have a lien on Demorna. Perhaps the petty Rajas of Demorna finding themselves placed between two powers each greater than themselves adopted the policy of propitiating both but refusing the payment of tribute to any.

"I believe" Jenkins remarked "if the ~~duars~~ were all again put under Rajas either the converted or the unconverted to Hinduism, that the inhabitants of the ~~duars~~ would be more pleased than under any of the Assamese now in charge and that the change would be beneficial to the Assamese and the Coasys.⁽¹⁾ The Hill Raja would prefer the plains and in no long lapse of time become one people with the Assamese."

The hopes of the Commissioner remained unfulfilled. Lord Auckland considered the claim of the Khasias "altogether untenable." "The relations between the hill chiefs and the persons really in lawful possession of the Desh" he observed "did not extend beyond the payment and receipt of tribute as the price of exemption from predatory incursions, a claim to blackmail of this description cannot be admitted by a regular government as a lien upon lands in possession of its peaceable subjects." Khyrem was, however, allowed as a matter of 'grace and policy' to have a share in Demorna on the lines suggested by Jenkins; but the Commissioner was forbidden

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(1) I.P.C. 10 July, No. 88; Thus, the Raja of Cherra who had 13 villages in Jayantea, all inhabited by the Bengalees, resided there for 8 months in the year. By his good management and liberal terms he had made himself exceedingly popular with the ryots. The same was also true of the chiefs of Molung, Bairampunji, Chella and Nungklow. The fortunes of these hill chiefs were so interwoven with the welfare of the plains that they were bound to indentify their interests with the inhabitants of the duars and could not afford to have always the role of an absentee landlord.

hereafter to make any change in the existing state of things, by ousting the Assamese in possession of any duars without the previous sanction of the Government. ⁽¹⁾

It appears, that the Governor General was influenced by considerations which were mainly strategic. If the whole of Demorua were restored to Khyrem and the duars on the West to the other claimants, the unity of the province would be lost; Khasias would command the whole country from Sylhet to the Brahmaputra and the lines of communication with Nowgong on the one hand and Gawalpara on the other would be completely cut off. What was the guarantee that Khyrem would not rise up again? In the event of another insurrection, Gauhati, only five miles off from the duars, would be between two fires and the whole country would be laid waste. The duars, instead of being a source of strength would then be a cause of embarrassment and weakness.

As a result, the Khasias continued to exhibit a spirit of ill-will and discontent against the Government and only the fear of heavy retribution prevented a general outbreak on their part. Nevertheless, there were uprisings in Jowai towards the close of 1835 and at Maram in early 1838. ⁽²⁾ Although the former was immediately suppressed, the latter continued to disturb for more than a year, requiring firm and drastic military action for their submission. ⁽³⁾

(1) B.R.C. 2 Aug. 1836, Nos. 35-37.

(2) B.P.C. 10 Sept. 1835, Nos. 3-6; 14 Sept. Nos. 5-6; I.P.C. 21 March, 1838, Nos. 161-2; 28 Mar. Nos. 52-4.

(3) I.P.C. 1 Aug., 1838, Nos. 89-96.

The Right of Blackmail - The Khasias were thus deprived of their rights over the duars, but a claim on similar grounds had to be conceded to the hill tribes in the north. By the so-called right of 'Posa' a number of khels - the members of which were called the 'Bohoteeahs', were bound to furnish the hill lords with their requirements of personal service and produce. It is rather difficult to specify accurately the articles collected by the chiefs and the conditions under which they were allowed to do so, for no two statements ever agree.⁽¹⁾ There is no doubt that every winter hordes of hillmen descended on the plains and collecting from every house whatever they required - rice, clothes, salt, spirits and livestock, returned at the close of the season to their respective abodes.⁽²⁾ To their demands, the 'Bohoteeahs' meekly submitted and thus got accustomed to a system of legalised robbery in respect of which they received a remission of revenue from the established government.

The situation was, however, radically changed by the Burmese war, which also carried away a large number of Bohoteeahs. The complete breakdown of the social and economic structure and the insecurity of life and property induced many to emigrate into areas under the direct control of the British authorities. In consequence, the entire brunt of the exactions had to be borne by the remaining pykes, who were now subjected to double or more

(1) See ante / 58 footnote

(2) B.R.C. 11 Aug. 1834, No. 5; Matthie to Robertson 10 Jan. 1834.

of the authorized demand. The disastrous effects of the deaths and desertions which we have already alluded to in the parganas of Kamrup and Darrang, were equally may severely felt by these unfortunate victims at the foot of the hills.

The hill tribes, entirely dependent as they were on the supplies of their pykes, made repeated inroads into the plains and carried off each in turn whatever they could. Early in 1830, the Abors advanced as far as the Brahmaputra in reclaiming their Meeree retainers.⁽¹⁾ The Duffas made similar inroads in pursuit of their fugitive Bohoteeahs; about the same time the Akas under Thagi Raja, their redoubtable chief, had been committing depredations in Charduar and Noduar.⁽²⁾ Under these circumstances, a system however tolerable once, had become odious and oppressive, causing wholesale depopulation in the northern regions of Darrang.

Incursions of Thagi Raja - The alarming situation caused by successive inroads drew the attention of Robertson. In February 1834, protesting against the evils of the existing system, he urged upon the Government of Bengal the necessity of effecting, by force if need be, the commutation of the blackmail for a money payment. At first the Government was unwilling to compel the chiefs to set aside a right formally recognised by Scott.⁽³⁾ In the following year, however, their attitude

(1) B.S.P.C. 26 Feb. 1830, No. 5.

(2) B.P.C. 4 May, 1835, No. 2; Matthie to Jenkins 3 Mar. '34.

(3) B.P.C. 20 Feb. 1834, Nos. 23-24.

changed completely. Early in 1835, some Akas known as the Kappachors, under Thagi Raja, raided the outpost of Balipara and killed 17 persons, men, women and children. This particular tribe was allowed only a share of the collections made by their neighbours, the Hazarikhawas, and were strictly prohibited by Scott from collecting blackmail on the grounds that they had no such right under the former government. This naturally made them desperate and vindictive in the exaction of their demands, which they considered as the common right of all hillmen. The attack on Balipara was evidently an "act of savage revenge". It was significant that the victims were all of the party of the Assam Light Infantry, the inhabitants of the adjacent villages were left entirely unmolested. ⁽¹⁾

The Government was now compelled to enforce strict measures to prevent further incursions. The frontier guards were strengthened. Thagi Raja and the Kappachors were declared outlaws liable to be fired on if they entered British possessions. Rewards were offered for the head of the chief or for any information leading to his arrest. Simultaneously, the inhabitants were warned on pain of severe punishment to refrain from furnishing information, grain or any necessaries to the marauders. ⁽²⁾

The punitive measures proved of no avail. Thagi Raja, remaining at large, continued his depredations and with a show of bravado collected his requirements, wherever he went. Only

(1) B.P.C. 13 Mar. 1835, No. 7; 4 May, No. 2.

(2) Ibid.

two months after the occurrence at Balipara in the presence of the police officers at Orung, a northern outpost in Darrang, he attacked the house of Madhu Saikia, an influential officer of the Government and caused much damage to his property. (1)

Evidently, the frontier guards were hopelessly weak and unable to afford adequate protection to the people. The latter being at the mercy of the banditti and fearing their vengeance, should they resist or complain, humbly submitted to their oppression.

Agreements with the Duflas - In August 1835, on the presumption that the Duflas were in league with the Kappachors, the Dufla blackmail was stopped. In retaliation, the Duflas of Charduar (2) made an attempt to kidnap some people from Balipara, which was, however, prevented by the timely intervention of the guards posted there. A native officer who followed the fugitives destroyed their granaries and succeeded in capturing some Duflas together with two of their chiefs. The anxiety of the other chiefs for the release of the captives enabled Capt. Matthie, the officer in charge of Darrang, to bring them to a new settlement. (3)

At a conference held at Tezpur on 17 April, 1836, nineteen Dufla chiefs entered into an agreement to the effect, that they would forego the custom of collecting blackmail in person from every house and would for the future receive them

(1) B.P.C. 3 Aug. 1835, No. 3; Matthie to Jenkins, 13 Apr. and 14 May, '35.

(2) Ibid; Nos. 3-4.

(3) I.P.C. 18 July, 1836, No. 76.

from the revenue officers, who would collect the articles from the ryots of their respective villages. They agreed further that in the event of the collectors not paying over to them the articles regularly and in full, they would come to the magistrate to complain and would on no account use force or carry off British subjects. They also took a formal oath never to combine with any tribe at enmity with the British but at all times to render assistance in opposing their enemies. ⁽¹⁾

Another agreement was reached after much bargaining, a year later, with the Duflas of Noduar. They likewise also abandoned their former custom of collecting blackmail personally, in favour of its collection by British officials; but they refused to agree to any fixed amount or to guarantee aid to the Government in cases of emergency. ⁽²⁾

The devoted attachment and jealousy with which the Duflas clung to their ancient custom made it practically impossible to effect any radical change in the existing system. Blackmail was retained intact, only with a change in the method of collection. There could be no doubt in the minds of these rude tribes, however backward, that to give up this right meant their political ruin - the loss of control over their retainers.

still the agreements must be considered a notable gain. It was impracticable to bring them to terms by a show of force.

(1) Ibid; Nos. 77-78.

(2) I.P.C. 15 May, 1837, No. 10; Vetch to Jenkins, 22 Mar. and 14 Apr. 1837.

In a country almost impenetrable, the difficulties to overcome were so numerous and of such a nature as to render pursuit beyond the boundary not only hazardous but likely to be disastrous. The Duflas might not be formidable, but they were inaccessible and capable of doing greater harm by their devastating inroads than the collection of an insignificant amount of blackmail. Anyhow, the agreements brought the suspicious hill chiefs into direct contact with the British officials and thus enabled the Government to get rid of a class of intriguing middlemen, who were interested in perpetuating the system.

II. Troubles over the Bhutan Duars.

Anomalous Engagement with Bhutan - Subject to the payment of a nominal tribute, the Bhutan Government held eight duars⁽¹⁾ in Assam besides others in Bengal;⁽²⁾ of these Bijni, Chapakhamar, Chappaguri, Buxa or Banska and Ghurkola were in Kamrup, Kalling, Buriguma and Mariapura were in Darrang.

'These Duars form the most valuable portion of the Bootan territory; through them and from them are procured, either directly or indirectly, almost every article of consumption or luxury which the inhabitants of the Hills possess. Their principal trade is with them; the priests and higher classes of laity subsist almost exclusively upon their produce. The silks of

(1) See ante, Introduction p. xviii, footnote

(2) Eleven in all, viz: Dalimcotā (Darling Jung), Zumercotē, Chamoorchee, Luckee, Duar, Buxa, Bhulka, Bara, Goomar, Reepo, Cherrung and Baghor Bijni duar.

China and the woollens of Tibet are purchased in barter for the cotton, rice and other products of the plains." (1)

"Yet the engagement by which Scott surrendered these valuable possessions was of a somewhat complicated nature and well calculated to produce the misunderstanding which arose at a very early date between the two governments." (2) The tribute was payable in kind (3) and as an inevitable consequence of payment of this nature disputes arose as to the value of the articles. The sezvals, who were appointed to receive the tribute were reported (4) to have frequently changed the articles originally sent substituting others of less value. These articles being sold by auction seldom realised the value at which they were appraised by the Bhutan Government and as each year's tribute in consequence fell short of the fixed amount, the revenue fell in arrears. (5)

(1) Pemberton: Bootan, p. 95.

(2) Eden, A. Political Mission to Bootan, p. 10.

(3) The tribute consisted mainly of gold, horses, musk, yak-tails, daggers, blankets, etc. amounting in Buxa duar to S.R. 2015-8, in Ghurkola Rs. 734 and in Bijniduar to S.R. 1434-12 as: See Pemberton: Bootan, Appendix, pp.107-8.

(4) Matthi. considered the whole system as a 'mockery' for the "trash" they sent was scarcely saleable and became worse every year. See Report of the Revenue and Judicial Administration, in Assam 1835. Section on Hill Tribes.

(5) The Deb Raja complained to the Agent "You are probably not aware of the reason of arrears of our current tribute It was customary when we first came to collect our revenue to present you with a piebald horse (?) and afterwards with others, but without any reference to the value of them, as also gold, knives, musk and chocoris (yak tails). Your people sell these articles at such a very low price that we must necessarily fall into arrear; the ryots in consequence are much oppressed You must know that the Raja gave up these Dooars for Pan Tamool (Pan and bettelnut) for the Dharm Raja." Eden A. Political Mission to Bootan, pp. 10-11.

The Darrang duars had still the remarkable peculiarity of alternate jurisdiction - the British Government exercised it from July to November and the Bhutan for the remaining eight months of the year. While in charge, the Bhutan Government was not subjected to any interference from the British authorities. Trouble began when the inhabitants of the duars committed acts of aggression on British subjects, apparently with the connivance of the local Bhutan authorities, who therefore paid little or no attention to the demands of the British officers for the surrender of the criminals.

Repeated acts of Aggression - Towards the close of October 1828, Doompa Raja, the Bhuteah chief of Buriguma entered into Chatgari, a pargana in Darrang and seized some people who were said to have been refugees from his jurisdiction and with them also the individual who gave them shelter. Later, the chief made a treacherous attack upon the police officer who was sent to the frontier to enquire into the dispute, killed some of the sepoy and carried off a number of men and women as captives. Scott referred the incident to the Bhutan Government and demanded the immediate surrender of both the captives and the offenders. When the latter took no notice of his demand, he annexed the duar. (1) Almost all

(1) Pemberton: Bootan, pp. 15-17.

the captives were rescued by the detachment that was posted there. The attachment of the duar hit the Bhuteahs hard and compelled them in 1831 to beg for its restoration, on the grounds that Doompa Raja, the author of the outrage was dead. The negotiations continued until July 1834, when Jenkins having received satisfactory proof that the offender was no more, restored the duar, on the promise of the Bhuteahs to pay a fine of Rs. 2000. (1)

Hardly had a few months passed, when in May 1835, a party of 50 men from the Bijni duar made an incursion into British territory and carried off eleven captives. The sepoy who were sent against the marauders succeeded in rescuing a few individuals and also seized the Bhuteah chief who admitted, that some of the captives were surrendered to Tongso Pilo, the governor of the duars on the Assam frontier. (2) The existence of mutual understanding between the offenders and the different Bhutan officials, who offered them protection in their respective jurisdictions was suspected in another attack from Kalling duar in November

(3) 1835. Not less than three daring ~~incursions~~ ^{raids} were committed in February 1836 in the North of Kamrup; all were supposed to have been committed under the express orders of Bura Talukdar, the Bhuteah officer in charge of Buxa duar. (4) "So great was the terror excited by these repeated incursions," reported Pemberton, "that the villages on the border were entirely deserted by our

(1) B.P.C. 14 Aug. 1834, No. 77.

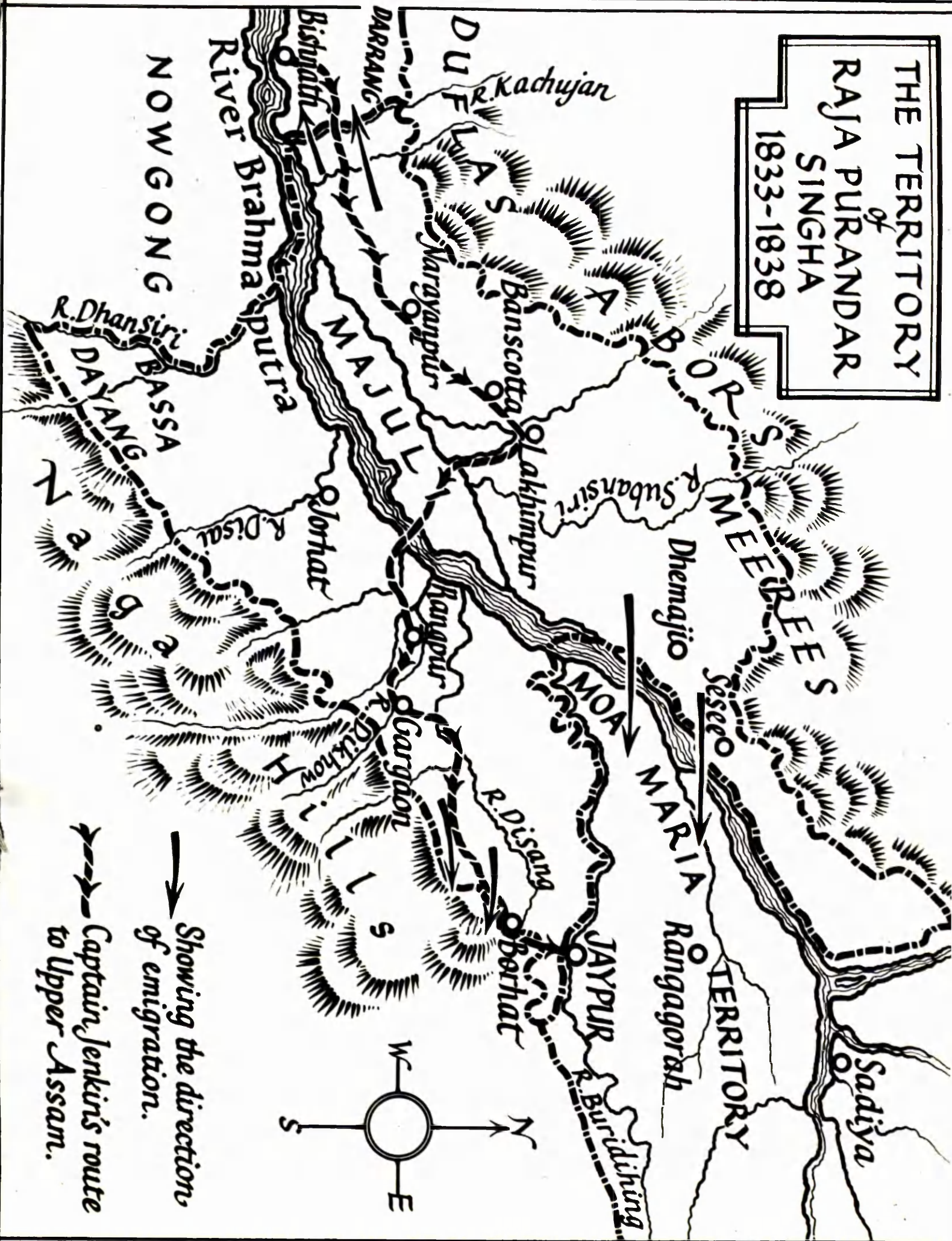
(2) B.P.C. 15 June, 1835, No. 1; 3 Aug. Nos. 5-7.

(3) B.P.C. 12 Jan. 1836, No. 5.

(4) B.P.C. 1 Mar. 1836, Nos. 2-3.

THE TERRITORY of RAJA PURANDAR SINGHA

1833-1838



Showing the direction
of emigration.

→ Captain Jenkins's route
to Upper Assam.

subjects and a general feeling of insecurity was rapidly extending along the whole line of frontier."⁽¹⁾

The higher authorities of the duar having refused as usual to deliver up the criminals, Captain Bogle with a party of Sebundies proceeded to the north and temporarily attached Buxaduar. The assumption of hostilities by the Bhuteahs made an engagement unavoidable at Subankhatta, near the frontier.⁽²⁾ This collision, the first since the British occupation of Assam, enabled the Government to form an estimate of the strength and equipment which the Bhuteahs were capable of collecting in an emergency, and resulted in the immediate dispersal of the Bhuteahs and the surrender of the banditti. It was followed by the despatch of Zinkoffs, or envoys, on the part of the Deb and Dharma Rajas, the Supreme authorities in Bhutan, with letters professing an anxious desire to maintain pacific relations with the British Government disavowing all previous knowledge of the "acts of local officers" and earnestly soliciting the release of Buxaduar from attachment. Jenkins refused to comply with this request unless the Bhutan Government bound itself to surrender the more heinous offenders and to make some more satisfactory arrangement for the due discharge of the payment to the Government. After some delay, an engagement to that effect was entered upon, the duar was opened and peace was restored on the frontier.⁽³⁾

(1) Pemberton: Bootan, pp. 17-18.

(2) Ibid. pp. 20-24.

(3) Ibid. pp. 25-26; See also the letters pp. 104-6.

The early British relations with the Bhutan officials on the Assam frontier were marked by extreme forbearance. Not only were these chiefs allowed the full enjoyment of their former privileges but even their arrears of tribute, repeated acts of aggression, and the murder and abduction of British subjects could not impel the Government of India to resort to arms. A rupture with Bhutan was felt likely to be highly injurious to the interests of the Government. "The first evil" as Robertson pointed out ⁽¹⁾ "is the suspension of all the measures now in progress for the improvement of the internal administration of Assam and probably the loss of a year's revenue from that portion of the country lying north of the Brahmapooter. The Assamese dread the Booteahs and the first symptom of hostile inroad from the hills would throw the population of the plains into consternation and put it for a season to flight."

"There would also be an indirect loss sustained by the cessation of that commercial intercourse whence there is every reason to hope that great benefits may soon accrue to Assam. The Booteahs not only require the produce of the plains for their support but seem disposed to become the customers of the Assamese for various commodities which the latter can either supply by their own industry or procure from Bengal to be exchanged, among other articles for gold"

"Years of disturbance and foreign invasion have interrupted the intercourse between the mountains and the plains,

(1) B.P.C. 12 Dec., 1833, No. 75.

but it has never been entirely broken off, and will now I trust, if not checked by any political misunderstanding, annually increase. But the inconvenience, both direct and indirect are insignificant in comparison with the expense and embarrassment to be apprehended from warlike operations, which if defensive must be confined to an unhealthy region at the foot of the hills or if active and offensive, be pursued at the imminent hazard of a war with China and without the slightest prospect of any compensatory result."

Pemberton's Mission to Bhutan - Coercive measures against Bhutan were therefore, "sedulously avoided." Buxaduar was released, but the engagements with the Zinkoffs remained a dead letter. Arrears of revenue accumulated⁽¹⁾. No attempt was made to effect the commutation of the existing mode of payment nor perhaps did any communication ever reach the Deb and Dharma Rajas, all being intercepted by the officials on the frontier. "I feel" Jenkins reported⁽²⁾ "we should fail in effecting any arrangement unless that Government would be prevailed upon to receive an English officer to negotiate all matters of dispute at their own Court and in personal communication with all the chiefs which compose it." Jenkins further pointed out, that the deputation of an envoy to the Court of

(1) Amounted to Rs. 26,231 in Feb. 1836; R.D.B. 6 Dec. 1836, No. 12.

(2) R.D.B. 6 Dec. 1836, No. 12.

Bhutan was necessary not only for the 'immediate arrangements' but generally for the extension of knowledge of a country, still imperfectly known as regards its products or political relations and particularly to remove, if there be any, the obstacles of trade with Bhutan and the Tibetan countries beyond it." (1)

"There can be no doubt," he added, "that if we could establish a perfectly free intercourse with Tibet the commerce with that country would become as valuable as, if not superior to, that carried on with any neighbouring state; but although there may be little hope at present of placing the trade between the countries on a reciprocal footing, as regards the permission of free entry to merchants of either from the influence of Chinese policy over these states, yet some arrangements very profitable to us might probably be made for the promotion and extension of the present petty commerce, by the establishment of periodical fairs along our frontier, to which the Tibetan caravans might be prevailed upon to meet our merchants." (2)

Influenced by these considerations the Government of India decided early in 1837 to send an envoy to Bhutan to settle the terms of commercial intercourse between the states, and if possible to effect such an adjustment of the tribute payable for the duars as might diminish the chances of misunderstanding arising from that source. When this decision was intimated to the authorities in Bhutan, they attempted to discourage such a measure. (3) The Government, however, determined on the despatch of the mission; it was to be

(1) I.P.C. 12 June, 1837, No. 58.

(2) Ibid.

(3) I.P.C. 10 Apr. 1837, No. 113; 17 Apr. Nos. 68-74; 7 Aug. Nos. 2, 3, & 6.

under Captain Pemberton, accompanied by Dr Griffith and Ensign Blake. Towards the close of October 1837, the mission left Calcutta en route for Bhutan.⁽¹⁾

III. The Growing Insecurity in the North-East.

In the meantime, there was a complete change in the political outlook on the new frontier. Towards the close of 1834, an officer was permanently posted at Sadiya in the person of Lieutenant Charlton.⁽²⁾ He was vested with limited criminal jurisdiction; but he was to function mainly as the channel of communication on behalf of the British Government with the neighbouring chieftains.⁽³⁾ With this appointment, the relations with the Khamti chiefs, who were on the whole faithful until 1834, became anything but friendly. They were

(1) I.P.C. 2 Aug. 1837, No. 71; See details Pemberton pp.36-40; Griffith, Journal of the Mission to Bootan, see Pemberton, pp. 125-52.

(2) B.P.C. 24 July, 1834; Nos. 78-80.

(3) With a view - in the words of Captain Jenkins - "to preserve tranquility among the frontier tribes, to stimulate them to habits of peaceful industry, to promote commerce and whatever tends to improve the conditions of the neighbourhood will also contribute towards our ultimate designs in retaining the post of Sadiya, that of calling for the resources on the spot for eventual military operations and thus giving to them the full importance of its position whether with a view to defend Assam from their invasions or to make an attack upon Ava." B.P.C. 4 Sept, 1834, Nos. 61-62; Jenkins to Charlton.

allowed to retain their respective jurisdictions unaffected and still continued to receive presents and arms, yet the Khamtis found it extremely galling to have an officer so near to them.

Saikhowa annexed - Matters came, before long, to a crisis. There had been a long-standing quarrel between the Sadiya Khowa and the Muttock chief over Saikhowa, a tract on the other side of the river, just opposite to Sadiya. ⁽¹⁾ It was inhabited by the Assamese refugees and yielded a certain amount of revenue; and therefore attracted the cupidity of the rival claimants. In 1839, Charlton issued an order directing both the chiefs to submit their disputes to the decision of the Political Agent. Notwithstanding this, the Sadiya Khowa took forcible possession of Saikhowa. Later his conduct towards Charlton was so ^{unmannerly} and he exhibited such a spirit of defiance that Captain Jenkins was compelled to adopt drastic measures against the chief. ^{In early 1835} He was suspended from his office and removed to Gauhati. Saikhowa was placed under the charge of the officer at Sadiya. ⁽²⁾ As a result, the Assamese on both sides of the river were brought under the immediate control of the Government. The remaining Khamti chiefs felt the action of the Government to be a grievance, for it deprived them of the services of the Assamese pykes.

(1) B.P.C. 13 Mar., 1835, No. 1; Charlton to White 6 Dec. '34; Jenkins to the Secy., Government of Bengal, 26 Jan. '35.

(2) Ibid.

As a matter of strict right, undoubtedly their claim was unjustified. It was only by an act of usurpation that they came to exercise their mastery over the Assamese and had, in fact, reduced them to the position of slaves. The resumption of this right - in the shape of interference with their slaves and bondsmen, produced nevertheless an inevitable irritation and alienation of feelings. The smouldering embers of discontent were ready to burst forth into flames as soon as an opportunity presented itself.

Incursions of Duffa Gaum - In July 1835, Duffa Gaum with a party of Hukawng Singphos made a sudden attack upon Beesa. After an indiscriminate massacre of the inhabitants, the village was plundered and reduced to ashes.⁽¹⁾ Charlton hastened with a party of the Assam Light Infantry to the aid of Beesa and met the enemy at a place called Gakinda, where two stockades had been erected. The first fell into his hands after the firing of a few shots, but he himself was severely wounded.⁽²⁾ Mr Bruce, who came to his rescue, blew up the second ~~blockade~~. Duffa reappeared soon after and established himself at the Manbhoom hill, from which he continued his depredations against the Gaums, many of whom were friendly to the British. Subsequently, Major White, the Political Agent in Upper Assam, continued the operations against Duffa and ultimately succeeded in driving him out of the frontier.⁽³⁾

(1) B.P.C. 3 Aug., 1835, No. 10.

(2) B.P.C. 10 Sept., 1835, No. 1.

(3) B.P.C. 8 Dec., 1835, No. 12; White to Jenkins 22 Nov., '35.

Duffa's raid was an act of personal revenge. He attacked Beesa Gaum not so much for plunder as from a mistaken sense of honour, common to his race, which impelled them never to rest until they had revenged an injury; and he acted in ignorance of the consequences, so far as the British Government was concerned.⁽¹⁾ Major White, who was fully aware of the actual situation, had made an abortive attempt, previous to his commencement of hostilities to bring the two chiefs to an amicable settlement.⁽²⁾ He had strong suspicions that the Khamtis were in league with Duffa and were mainly responsible for the defeat of the negotiations. "The Khamti chiefs," reported White, "soured in temper by the innovations were the first to call on Duffa Gaum with a view to exciting trouble and preventing our plans from being matured. At the same time I strongly suspect them of having marred the negotiations with Duffa Gaum as I entertain not the slightest doubt of his sincere desire for peace."⁽³⁾ The temper of the

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- (1) B.P.C. 17 Aug., 1835, No. 2; Charlton to White, 17 July, '35: Charlton reported, that Duffa had despatched a vakile to inform him that the target of the present attack was Beesa Gaum who had killed his wife and was still endeavouring to murder him and his whole family. Duffa was therefore bound to avenge the wrong done to him lest he be held a dishonoured man in the estimation of his companions. The vakil also added that Duffa's vengeance had been amply satisfied as he had killed not only his enemy's wife but the wife of his son also, and consequently the two chiefs were now placed on a footing of equality.
- (2) B.P.C. 8 Dec. 1835, No. 12; White to Jenkins 22 Nov., 1835.
- (3) Ibid.

Khamti chiefs justified his presumptions. They afforded him no active assistance, and made no attempt to obstruct the retreat of the Gaum; their force 'merely served to swell the ranks of a procession'. Still it was felt politic to accept them - for it was safer to keep an eye upon them rather than to leave⁽¹⁾ them in the rear.

The Frontier Missions from Ava:-Hannay's Mission - On the suggestion of Captain Jenkins, the Government of India thought it desirable to bring to the notice of the Court of Ava the movements of the Singphos from Hukawng.⁽²⁾ Accordingly, Major Burney, the British Resident was directed to impress on the Ministers, that it was their responsibility to punish the offenders for the recent outrage and to prevent similar occurrences in future. Burney succeeded in prevailing upon the Court to send a mission; it was arranged that Captain Hannay, the officer commanding the Escort, accompanied by the Governor of Mogaung should proceed to the North "to ascertain and report to the Assam authorities the real state of affairs."⁽³⁾ The mission left Ava on 22 November, 1835, reached Mogaung on 5 January, 1836 and Hukawng on the 31st of the same month. The redoubtable Duffa, invited by Hannay to a friendly meeting, unexpectedly volunteered his submission.⁽⁴⁾ He was brought down to Ava. But

(1) Ibid.

(2) B.P.C. 21 Sept., 1835, Nos. 2-3.

(3) See W.S. Desai: History of the British Residency in Burma, 1826-90, pp. 239-41.

(4) For details see Selection of Papers, regarding the Hill Tracts between Assam and Burma, pp. 83-109.

to the great dissatisfaction of the Government of India, instead of punishing this "atrocious offender", the Court of Ava contented themselves with a written pledge ~~from Duffa~~ ^{his} for future good conduct. The Resident, however, called upon the Ministers and warned them to take necessary action to restrain the chief and his followers from committing further inroads over the British frontier of Assam. ⁽¹⁾

Bayfield's Mission - Dissatisfied with the results of Hannay's Mission, Burney urged upon the Ministers to send a Second Mission to effect a final settlement of the frontier disputes. On the subject of the proposed mission, he pointed out to the Government of India, that the commercial and economic possibilities of the region inhabited by the Shans and Kachins ought to be explored. ⁽²⁾ The authorities in Assam were equally interested in recommending the project. They hoped ^{it} ~~in~~ would result in the emancipation of many of the Assamese, who were still kept in Burma as captives. Jenkins felt, that the Burmese would vigorously oppose a direct attempt to effect the liberation of these wretched beings; their release, he rightly considered, must be effected by "indirect and gradual means" under "the pretence of quieting the frontier, subduing the Singphos and facilitating Ava communications for traffic." ⁽³⁾

(1) I.P.C. 23 Jan., 1837, No. 26; Burney to the Secy., Government of India, 3 Dec., 1836.

(2) See Desai, W.S., History of British Residency in Burma, 1826-40, pp. 239-41.

(3) I.P.C, 27 June, 1836, No. 49.

Influenced by these considerations the Government of India agreed and recommended that Mr Bayfield, the Assistant to the Resident, be deputed on a second mission. Simultaneously, Captain Hannay, who was then called to the Presidency, was redirected to Assam, to proceed in company of some officers from that province to the frontier, with a view to meeting the Burmese mission to discuss measures of security and of commercial intercourse between Assam and Burma.⁽¹⁾ The Ministers, who had been showing an utter indifference to the project of commercial traffic, reluctantly acquiesced when the prospect was held out before them that at the joint conference a decision might also be taken on the still undefined boundary between the two governments.⁽²⁾

Bayfield left Ava on 13 December 1836. He was joined on his way by the Governor of Mogaung and Duffa Gaum. In the meanwhile, Major White, accompanied by Hannay, and Dr Griffith had advanced to meet him. The Major, however, was obliged to return before reaching the rendezvous, because his provisions ran short and his communications were cut off by the Singphos.⁽³⁾ Nevertheless, with extreme difficulty Hannay succeeded in crossing the Patkai. At the summit of the hill a meeting took place on 9 March, 1837. The only question discussed was the

(1) I.P.C. 26 Sept., 1836, Nos. 45-48.

(2) I.P.C. 23 Jan. 1837, Nos. 24-5.

(3) I.P.C. 10 Apr. 1837, No. 120: For details see Selections of Papers regarding the Hill Tracts, pp. 134-244.

boundary; but no decision was reached because of the extravagant demands put forward by the Governor of Mogaung, who claimed that the territories of Burma extended as far as Jaypur, in Upper Assam.⁽¹⁾

The Beginning of the Doanea Militia - The Burmese missions ended in a fiasco. Nothing was done to bring Duffa Gaum or the Singphos under control nor could any measures be taken to keep the lines of communication and trade with Ava open. The labours of Hannay, Bayfield and Dr Griffith nevertheless dispelled the doubts and uncertainties concerning a region which had been so long a complete mystery to the outside world. They promoted the exploration of new routes on either side of the Patkai and furnished authentic information about the geographical and commercial interests in the South-East corner of Assam. It was now definitely learnt that the district in question, besides possessing great fertility and yielding the ordinary products of the province, was surrounded by fine timber, produced tea and abounded in coal, petroleum and iron ore. To tap these valuable resources and to open up commercial intercourse with the adjoining countries, it was felt that protection must be afforded to the inhabitants by keeping the rude tribes in check. It was hoped with the co-operation of the Burmese they would be coerced. The failure of the missions, however, made it clear

(1) I.P.C. 10 Apr. 1837, No. 122; Hannay to White, 16 Mar. '37.

(2) See the Selection of Papers regarding the Hill Tracts between Assam and Burma, pp. 83-119, 125-33 and 134-244.

that such hopes were vain. It therefore became obviously necessary to establish a strong post on the South-East frontier. At the same time it was realised that the post must be manned by people who could fight the Singphos at all seasons of the year, because the Western Sepoys, with their prejudice of caste and constitution proved entirely unfit for sustained service in frontier jungles. Accordingly, in the middle of 1837, a new levy was raised by Captain Hannay at Jaypur. The recruits were mainly the Doaneahs - having a mixed parentage of the Singphos and the Assamese - and naturally therefore of the same country and hardihood as the Singphos themselves. ⁽¹⁾ By providing permanent employment for some of the inhabitants of the region, it was hoped, in the words of Jenkins, "to give confidence to the people ... to attach them and their families to our interests and gradually provide for the defence of the frontier out of the native tribes which are now only a source of trouble and suspicion." ⁽²⁾

The Threatening Attitude of Ava - The frontier missions served to embitter the relations between the Government of India and the Court of Ava. The Burmese, who had all along been jealous of the interference of the British Government in the affairs of the frontier tribes grew highly suspicious of the activities

(1) I.P.C. 19 June, 1837, Nos. 57-8.

(2) I.P.C. 14 Aug. 1837, No. 77.

of Hannay and they came to the conclusion that the British were making preparations for the conquest of the North. To remove such fears attempts were made by the Government, but without success. ⁽¹⁾ With the beginning of the rule of Prince Tharrawaddy, who had usurped the throne of Ava in 1837, the relations between the two governments became worse and even drifted towards a rupture. The new king was determined to undo the Treaty of Yandabo and assumed a definite policy of hostility against the British Government. Actually he made preparations for war by collecting arms, recruiting men and strengthening the frontiers. When this state of affairs was brought to the attention of the Government of India, Lord Auckland, in spite of his aversion to war, had to take precautionary measure for the defence of the frontier of Assam, Arakan and Manipur. ⁽²⁾

IV. The Early Angami Expeditions.

Towards the close of 1835, a new danger appeared in North Cachar - the incursions of the Angamis. ⁽³⁾ The Nagas who occupied the hills extending from the river Dhansiri to Kapili on the one hand and to the confines of Cachar and

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- (1) I.P.C. 20 Mar. 1837, No. 82; Secretary to the Government of India to the Resident at Ava.
 (2) Banerjee, A.C. Annexation of Burma, pp. 29-31, 33, 39-40; Desai, W.S. History of the British Residency in Burma, Chapter XI. Hall, D.G.E. Europe & Burma, pp. 134-5.
 (3) B.P.C. 24 Nov. 1835, No. 3.

Manipur on the other were divided into two main groups - the Angamis and the Rengmas or Gasingas. Each of them was again subdivided into a number of clans ruled by their respective chiefs who acknowledged no sovereign authority. These chiefs were nominal heads of each clan having "the least particle of power beyond that given them by the vox populi and only pro tem., upon the particular question that may happen to be exciting attention at the time being." (1)

They were, however, always at daggers drawn with one another. Divided as they were into a number of warring communities, with chiefs excessively jealous of each other, the Angamis were incapable of offering any concerted action against their common enemy and were therefore victims of the aggression of their neighbours - the Kacharees and the Manipuris. The rulers of Cachar had been endeavouring to subjugate the Nagas to reduce them to the position of slaves, while the Raja of Manipur always aimed at making the land of the Angamis his sole preserve. (2) In January 1832, Captain Jenkins and Pemberton, for the first time on the part of an Englishman fought their way through the Angami territory to Nowgong. In the following year, Gambhir Sing, the Raja of Manipur appeared

(1) I.P.C. 19 Apr. 1841, No. 107; Grange to Bigge, 1 July, '40. See also Butler's Account of the Nagas, 1873, quoted in Mackenzie, A; North East Frontier of Bengal, p. 86: Hutton, J.H. The Angami Nagas (1921) p. 142.

(2) I.P.C. 6 Feb. 1839, No. 60; Jenkins to Bigge 18 Dec. '38.

in the hills with the object of bringing the Nagas within his jurisdiction. In the neighbourhood of the newly restored monarchy of Raja Purandar, the presence of the Manipur Raj was considered somewhat "uncomfortable".⁽¹⁾ He was therefore asked not to advance beyond the hills, but a free hand was given to him over the Angamis, perhaps with the object of erecting Manipur as a bulwark against their incursions.

Measures against early Inroads.-- It is rather difficult to ascertain the real cause of their disturbances. Jenkins presumed that the incursions originated in disputes between the Nagas and the Kacharees over salt springs near Semkhar.⁽²⁾ On the other hand, Lieutenant Bigge, the officer in charge of Nowgong, pointed out that the Angamis, like all other hill tribes, when hard pressed came down for provisions in bands to the plains. If they obtained supplies, no harm was done to the people, otherwise they carried away by force whatever they could.⁽³⁾ The British occupation of North Cachar had probably led the Kacharees to resist such occasional demands and in consequence to suffer from the marauding raids of the Nagas.

Whatever the cause, the Government of Bengal at first considered it to be the joint responsibility of Tularam and the Raja of Manipur to control the Nagas. Accordingly they were called

(1) B.P.C. 14 Jan. 1833, Nos. 69-70; 30 Mar. No. 110; 30 May, No. 105.

(2) I.P.C. 6 Feb. 1839, No. 164. Jenkins to Bigge.

(3) I.P.C. 27 Feb. 1839, No. 60.

upon the establish a number of military posts on the Naga frontier to prevent future inroads. (1) Tularam, who had neither the means nor the power humbly professed his inability to check the raiders. The forces of Manipur were quartered for a time at Semkhar and Ringyee. But they received neither pay nor provisions; they had to supply themselves in the hills with forced contributions and this oppression inevitably caused the Nagas to retaliate vigorously. Under these circumstances, it was obvious to Jenkins that there could be no peace on the frontier of Cachar. (2) But the Government was not then disposed to occupy the territory and still less inclined to allow Manipur to have it permanently. In May 1937, Jenkins was however directed to despatch an officer, with a detachment of troops, to ascertain "the measures of defence or of conciliation" in face of existing evils. Lieut. Lyons of the Sylhet Light Infantry was selected for this purpose and preparations were set on foot for his departure. (3) At this juncture, the threatening attitude of Ava and the urgent need to take measures to defend Manipur frontier caused the postponement of the project; and it was even suggested that the Manipur government might be allowed to occupy the land of the Angamis as a preventive against their inroads. (4)

(1) B.P.C. 29 Dec., 1835, No. 47.

(2) I.P.C. 21 Nov., 1838, Nos. 104-5.

(3) I.P.C. 8 May, 1837, No. 3.

(4) I.P.C. 8 Nov., 1837 No. 50; 21 Sept., No. 121; Secretary to the Government of India to Capt. Gordon.

This vacillating policy subjected the Kacharees to the repeated aggressions of the Nagas. In the early months of 1838, when the Government was preoccupied with the threat of a Burmese invasion, the situation had become so serious and the lack of protection to the ⁱⁿhabitants was so obvious, that in October 1838, Captain Burns, officer in charge of Cachar, had to impress upon the Government the urgent necessity either of sending a detachment of sufficient strength or of permanently establishing Manipur as a counterpoise against the Nagas. "One thing is clear," he stressed, "that nothing but a severe example of these savages and in their own country will put a stop to their murderous inroads." ⁽¹⁾ The representations of the local authorities and the Commissioner of Dacca roused the attention of the Government and it was decided to send an expedition against the Angamis. But the Burmese menace was not yet over. The detachment of the ~~Sylhet~~ Light Infantry could not be spared from the outposts of the Manipur frontier. In addition a number of sepoy had had to be engaged about this time in the Khasia Hills against the refractory Marams. Apart from the inadequacy of available troops, there were also the difficulties of transport and of supplies in an inaccessible country. Under these circumstances, on the suggestion of Burns, it was decided to raise a new ⁽²⁾ levy from the Kacharees to co-operate in the expedition.

(1) I.P.C. 21 Nov. 1838, No. 105. Burns to Jenkins, 3 Oct. 1838.

(2) I.P.C. 21 Nov. 1838, Nos. 105-8.

Expeditions under Grange - In early 1839, Mr Grange, the Sub-Assistant in Nowgong, with a party of Sebundies, led an expedition against the Angamis. Since arms and ammunition did not reach them in time, only 36 men of the new Kacharee levy (1) could join him. He proceeded via Semkhar, Beereh-mah, Balookhi-mah, towards Samogooting and Mohungdijua. Unfortunately lack of supplies and transport and mainly the failure of the expected aid from Cachar, made it impossible to carry on his operations. (2) The expedition terminated without much success. The only achievement of this enterprise was the voluntary submission of a number of Sardars (chiefs) near Semkhar, who were oppressed by the Angamis. They placed themselves under the protection of the Government and also agreed to pay a house tax. (3)

It was soon realised that this incursion could do nothing effective. The Nagas were driven temporarily from their villages, only to return after the withdrawal of the troops and renew their excesses with greater ferocity, in return for the punishment inflicted upon them. It therefore became necessary to immediately post parties of pickets at the strategic points and also to despatch another expedition for the final reduction of the refractory chiefs. (4) Towards the close of 1839, Grange was

(1) I.P.C. 6 Feb. 1839, No. 60; Jenkins to Bigge; 27 Feb. Nos. 164 & 168.

(2) For details see Butler, J: Travels and Adventures in Assam, pp. 104-5.

(3) I.P.C. 27 Feb. 1839, No. 166; Burns to Jenkins, 15 Feb. '39.

(4) I.P.C. 14 Aug., Nos. 107-9.

again directed to proceed to the hills with a body of troops. The Kacharee Levy, which being found unsuitable to employ against the Nagas, was in the meantime disbanded. Captain Brodie, the officer in charge of Sibsager was therefore asked to send a detachment by the lines of Dhansiri. Simultaneously, on the south of the hills Captain Gordon, the Political Agent in Manipur was directed to act in concert with Grange, with the Manipur Levy. Preparations were thus made from these ^{var} directions to effect the complete subjugation of the Angamis. (1)

Effects of the Expeditions - Difficulties, however, confronted Grange from the very beginning. Troubles arising out of the collection and delivery of provisions prevented him from advancing to the hills till the end of January 1840. On the 23rd of that month he reached the first Naga village in the Samogooting hills. On 1st February he advanced to the rendezvous appointed for the Manipuri detachment under Gordon. To his utter disappointment, the delay had compelled the Manipurs to leave the field, owing to shortage of supplies, before his arrival. This misunderstanding and the failure to effect a junction with Gordon made it impossible for him with a handful of men to proceed against the Nagas. (2)

This second expedition therefore achieved practically nothing. Punishments were, however, meted out to the Nagas of

(1) I.P.C. 1 Jan. 1840, No. 112; Bigge to Grange, 26 Nov. '39.

(2) I.P.C. 25 May, 1840, No. 118.

Jappama and Konema - the former for killing a man of his party, the latter for attacking him on his return. Thus he demonstrated that the British Government had the power of chastising them for offences against their subjects. To effect the return of a number of captives whom Grange had seized, two chiefs of Samogooting, Impang and Ikayi came down later to Nowgong and entered into an engagement with a promise that they would settle in the plains of ⁽¹⁾ Mohungaijue.

As the result of these expeditions the incursions of the Nagas were temporarily suspended and the ryots were enabled to extend their cultivation to the South, much beyond the former limit. ⁽²⁾ The Angamis, however, remained unsubdued. They were brave in their mountains, adept in surprise night attacks and most formidable in rolling down stones against their enemies. Their villages might be burned, their grain could be easily destroyed, but it was not easy to overpower them and still more difficult to meet them in a pitched battle. In fact, the early Angami expedition revealed the utter weakness of regular troops in a war of attrition.

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(1) I.P.C. 15 June, No. 98; Biggs to Jenkins, 28 May, '40.

(2). I.P.C. 25 May, 1840, No. 118.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PROBLEMS OF THE FRONTIER\$ - Period of Consolidation
and Conciliation (1839-45).

I. The Tragedy of Sadiya.

The Gathering of Storms - Ever since 1837, the situation on the North East frontier was extremely disquieting. At any moment, there was the possibility of a rupture with Burma. The Singphos under Beesa Gaum might be powerless on account of their family feuds, but Duffa Gaum was still at large in Hukawng. The ex-Sadiya Khowa was allowed to return, but shorn as he was of his former power he was greatly discontented. In fact, the Khamti chiefs as a whole were disgusted at the continuance of the new order over what they had hitherto considered as their own territory. Owing to the failure of Duffa's enterprise - he was alleged to have been invited by them, - the Khanties determined upon a last bid to recover their power. Actually, from the middle of 1837, alarming news began to spread of the combination of the Abors and Mishmis with the Khanties; and when at times they assembled at the foot of the hills and were about to descend upon the plains, the news caused such horror that many villagers took to passing their nights in the jungle while others sat up the whole night in fear of a surprise attack. (1)

(1) I.P.C. 15 May, 1837, No. 12: Miller to Jenkins, 14 Apr. '37.

The strategic position of Sadiya was also not very favourable. Situated at a distance of 250 miles from the headquarters of the Assam Light Infantry and with a guard of about 200 men, it had always been vulnerable. That it was the weakest point in the whole ring of frontiers was obvious to Jenkins, who had been in fact, urging upon the Government since 1837 the necessity of the removal of the Assam Light Infantry to some place nearer the South-East frontier.⁽¹⁾ "Sadiya seems to me" he pointed out, "a most commanding position with reference not only to Ava but also to the Singpho districts and it entirely commands the Muttock country containing the bulk of the population of the Sadiya district, from whose co-operation or hostility we have most to hope or fear."⁽²⁾

The death of Barsenpati - In the meanwhile, the death of the Moamaria chief on 2nd January, 1839, presented another problem.⁽³⁾ The time had now arrived to rectify a defective engagement and to safeguard the interests of the British speculators in Muttock, which had developed in the meantime into one of the best tea-growing

(1) I.P.C. 31 July, 1837, Nos. 64-65.

(2) I.P.C. 5 Feb. 1838, No. 33.

(3) I.P.C. 30 Jan. 1839, No. 63; Hannay to Jenkins, 3 Jan. '39.

districts in India. Major White endeavoured to effect a new agreement with Maju Gohain, the second son of the late chief, who had then assumed the management of the district. He demanded from the chief as the price of recognition, an increase in tribute of Rs. 10,000 in addition to the grant to the Government of a free hand in all the waste lands in his territory. ⁽¹⁾ So vehement was the opposition of the people in general and of the sons of the Senapati in particular, that it was obvious to White that nothing but force could compel the chief to accept his terms. At this juncture, the application of that force was, however, felt to be highly impolitic. ⁽²⁾ Consequently, the unsuccessful intervention in the affairs of Muttock only served to create fears and suspicion in the minds of a people still loyal to the British Government.

The Tragedy and Its Aftermath - Considering the situation in the North East frontier serious, mainly in view of the hostile attitude of Ava, the Governor General in Council approved the precautionary measures suggested by Jenkins. ⁽³⁾ Hardly had Major White removed a portion of the regiments to Sadiya, when at midnight on the 28 January, 1839, the cantonment was suddenly attacked by the Khamtis. The insurgents, numbering about 600 strong, armed with dahs, spears and muskets commenced their assault from four points, burning the houses, cutting

(1) I.P.C. 14 Aug., 1839, No. 105; White to Jenkins, 26 Jan. '39.

(2) Ibid.

(3) I.P.C. 28 Nov. 1838, No. 132.

down everyone on the way and killing men, women and children, among them the Commandant Major White. On the day preceding the fateful event, all the chiefs attended the Durbar and apparently exhibited their best temper. It was evident that they had made their plans with great secrecy. They were "fatally successful" so far as their immediate objectives were concerned.⁽¹⁾

The attack, however, was immediately repulsed. Lieut. Marshal, who followed the fugitives to the Mishmi Hills succeeded in killing ~~Panna~~ Gohain, one of the principal chiefs.⁽²⁾ A few days later the Khamtis reappeared and attacked a Doaneah village near Saikhowa, but were again beaten back. Considerable excitement and agitation prevailed among the inhabitants who regarded the incursion of the Khamtis as only a prelude to a further invasion of the Burmese. The simultaneous appearance of a number of Kakoos at Muttock and Jaypur and the reports of Beesa Gaum that a Burmese force had actually arrived at Hukawng, were sufficient to keep the people in a state of constant alarm.⁽³⁾

The task before the local authorities were obviously formidable. Every precaution had to be taken to restore the confidence of the people and to cover the country from the disastrous raids expected at any moment from the Shans and the Singphos. The district officers were directed to move up all

(1) I.P.C. 20 Feb. 1839, Nos. 105-110.

(2) I.P.C. 27 Feb. 1839, No. 160.

(3) I.P.C. 20 Feb. 1839, No. 108; 20 Mar., No. 31; 22 May, 1839, No. 117.

disposable troops to the North-East frontier. The Doaneah militia was immediately ordered to be increased by a levy of two companies of 100 each. A reinforcement was at the same time sent to the aid of Mr. C.A. Bruce who had stockaded himself at the new fort of Jaypur. In the meantime, Captain Hannay, who, being vested ^{with} the temporary command of the Assam Light Infantry, raided the Khamtis in the neighbourhood of Sadiya and Derak, burnt their villages, destroyed their grain and adopted measures for the apprehension of the ringleaders. ⁽¹⁾ These prompt measures resulted in decisive results. In a fortnight, tranquillity was restored in the North of the Brahmaputra. A number of Abor chiefs came down and volunteered their services. The Dibong Mishmis, who had actually aided and sheltered the Khamtis, were severely punished and a number of slaves rescued from their hands. The son of Sadiya Khowa Gohain with some of his followers who were being forced to join the rebels, effected their escape and placed themselves under the protection of the Government. ⁽²⁾

Capt. Hannay had the firm conviction that "some deep laid plot was in agitation to subvert the British Government in Assam." He suspected the sons of the late Senapati as instrumental in, or at least cognizant of the outbreak. ⁽³⁾ It was also generally believed that the Burmese were the instigators of these moves. ⁽⁴⁾ The implication of other parties

(1) I.P.C. 20 Feb. 1839, Nos. 7-8; 27 Feb. No. 162; 2 Mar. No. 75; 13 Mar. No. 70.

(2) I.P.C. 20 Mar. 1839, No. 31; 8 May, No. 81.

(3) I.P.C. 22 May, 1839, No. 117; Hannay to Jenkins, 2 Mar. '39.

(4) I.P.C. 6 Mar. 1839, No. 129.

besides the Khamtis is however difficult to ascertain, as the failure of the attempt prevented most of them from assisting afterwards.

The attack was doubtless "the boldest attempt" ever made by the hill-tribes on the Assam frontier. Fortunately, it was ill-timed - for the troops had been reinforced only a few days before, and had only the blessing, and not the wholehearted support of the neighbouring races. Otherwise Upper Assam would probably have been lost temporarily and would only have been recovered after complete devastation. "Even though the attack failed" as Mr Bird, the member of the Supreme Council rightly observed, "the panic which it had occasioned extended not only throughout the Province, but all along the eastern frontier. The loss of the Province or any serious impression made upon our forces in that quarter would be attended with consequences, the extent of which is not easy to foresee. Not only would the whole of the Tea cultivation, now more important than ever, be swept away, but it would open a road to the heart of our most valuable province to a host of enemies." (1)

II. The Defence of the Frontiers.

The relations with Ava continued to be far from satisfactory and in fact Jenkins was convinced that hostilities with the Burmese was unavoidable. Even if there were no war,

(1) I.P.C. 5 June, 1839, No. 88; Minute by Mr Bird, 22 May, '39.

he thought there could be no peace in the North-East, so long as the Frontier tribes remained unsubdued. It was also feared that Duffa Gaum might try his luck once again and in such an eventuality he could well expect the sympathetic support at least of the Muttocks, if they were not given the former status of ^{the} Barsenapati. The strengthening of the defence of the frontier, therefore, had become absolutely necessary. Jenkins wrote to the Government: "In the event of a war with Ava an increase in the present force is unavoidable and also from the very unsettled state of the frontier. Should hostilities (do) not take place, yet it is highly expedient that we should take measures to bring all the frontier districts more completely under control than they are at present and this cannot be done without advancing our posts. To enable us to do so an increase in the troops seems urgent." (1)

It has been pointed out that after the withdrawal of regular troops, the defence of the province was entrusted to the Assam Light Infantry with the contingents supplied by the Muttocks and the Khamtis. (2) There were also some irregulars at Gawalpara known as ^{the} 'Sebundies' and in August 1832, another unit of 120, 'The Gauhati Sebundies' was added to them which made the total strength to one of 320 rank and file. (3) In 1835, this unit was placed under military control and formed into a

(1) I.P.C. 5 June, 1839, No. 84; Jenkins to the Government of India, 27 Apr. '39.

(2) See ante p. 51-52

(3) B.P.C. 6 Aug. 1832, Nos. 58-59.

regiment of Eight Companies of 80 men in each. On account of the heavy duties imposed by the occupation of Jayantea, expeditions against the Bhuteans and by the demand for additional troops at Sadiya, the Sebundies were further augmented in 1836 with an increase of 20 men per Company. (1)

In 1836, the Khamtis voluntarily commuted the services of their military pykes, like the Muttocks, for a payment in money. (2) The loss might have been compensated for to a certain extent by the addition of Assam or Jorhat Militia, for the annexation of Upper Assam. But they were found to be nothing better than undisciplined Pabbles, entirely unfit for military action. Apart from that, with the growing disaffection of the tribes on the whole of the frontier, it was felt highly impolitic to repose any more confidence in their half-hearted loyalty. Just a few months before the occurrence at Sadiya, Jenkins proposed an increase of 10 or 12 men per Company to the Assam Light Infantry and the Sebundies to one of 10 Companies with a corresponding increase in the number of European officers. Considering the Assam Militia as 'worthless' and 'untrustworthy' he further recommended its disbandment by increasing the strength of the Doaneahs, who, it was hoped, would prove more faithful. (3)

(1) I.P.C. 9 Oct. 1839, No. 92; Minute by Mr Robertson.

(2) B.P.C. 15 Mar. 1836, No. 19; Charlton to the Secy. Government of Bengal, 10 Mar. '36.

(3) I.P.C. 16 Jan. 1839, Nos. 52 & 54.

The tragic event at Sadiya coupled with the strained relations with the Court of Ava drew the attention of the Government of India to the necessity of making better provision for the defence of the Assam Frontier. In June, 1839, in concurrence with the recommendation of Captain Jenkins, the Governor General in Council sanctioned the following measure⁽¹⁾ that:

a) A third local corps known as "the Upper Assam Sebundies" should be formed with headquarters at Jaypur, into which the Doaneah Levy was to be absorbed. This should consist of 640 men with corresponding complement of European officers.

b) The Sebundy Corps of Lower Assam was to be raised to 1,000 men, with the addition of a Second Officer in Command, while the Assam Light Infantry was to be strengthened by an increase of 10 or 12 men per Company.

c) The cantonment of Sadiya being vulnerable to sudden attack, was to be removed to Saikhowa on the South bank of the Brahmaputra, where it would be nearer to the sources of supplies and less exposed to the incursions of the hostile tribes.

d) Finally, to ward off the danger of the doubtful allegiance of the Singphos military outposts were to be established at Dalli, Tazee, Kooju and Ningro; and to complete the lines of defence, communications were to be opened as

(1) P.L.I.B. 21 Aug., 1839, No. 62; 26 Aug. No. 65.

quickly as possible from Saikhowa to Jaypur and thence to Ningro.

As an emergency measure the defence of the province was placed under Brigadier Littler, the Commandant of Eastern India and a reinforcement was immediately despatched to Bishnath.⁽¹⁾

Greater emphasis was laid even now on the Local Corps. It was felt highly inexpedient to employ regulars inasmuch as "they require so much in the way of commissariat, spend so very little in the country, excite so much envy among the locals who receive inferior pay and are so liable to sink both in health and spirits that it is seldom that either the Government or the people can derive any benefit from their presence in a province like Assam."⁽²⁾

On the whole, measures were adopted not only for the immediate emergency in the event of a war with Ava but for the permanent defence of the province. Apart from resisting the aggressions of the Singphos and Khamtis, the new force would be able to relieve the Assam Light Infantry, which could then be kept as a reserve instead of frittering it away in frontier outposts. The Sebundies being supported by the reinforcement could be employed against the Bhuteans and the Duffas, if necessary; while two Companies of the same unit were deemed sufficient to check and punish any insubordination on the part of the hill tribes in the South West.

(1) I.P.C. 5 June, 1839, No. 87; 18 Sept., No. 160.

(2) I.P.C. 5 June, 1839, No. 87; Minute by Robertson, 22 May, '39.

III. Annexation of Muttock.

The Difficulties in Settlement - Towards the close of 1839, after the arrival of reinforcements, the local authorities directed their attention to Maju Gohain, the chief of the Muttocks who was suspected of complicity in the late incident. Appointed as he was by the support of his followers, it was inequitable to oust him nor was it possible on the part of the chief to enter into an agreement with the Government against the wishes of his community. "The Muttocks, stiff-necked people as they are" Major White admitted "would not submit to a heavier assessment."⁽¹⁾ Vetch also remarked "We cannot hold to the demand of 10,000 without the risk of disaffection. It would further be used as a pretext for oppression or as the watchword for revolt in time of trouble."⁽²⁾ But once the demands were made, to forego it without a further equivalent would be attributed to weakness.

The situation had become one of extreme delicacy, but a solution came from the Muttocks themselves. They were now divided into two sectarian groups - the Morans or the Upper and the Lower Muttocks, each having a Gosain or spiritual head of its own who aimed at dominating the other. The Morans who claimed a superiority of extraction, did not admit the right of the Senapati's family to rule over them.⁽³⁾ In fact their

(1) I.P.C. 14 Aug. 1839, No. 105; White to Jenkins 26 Jan. '39.

(2) Ibid; Vetch to Jenkins, 11 May, '39.

(3) Ibid; Jenkins to the Government of India, 29 May, '39.

party strife and sectarian rivalry went so high as to induce them to welcome the rule of the British in preference to that of the Muttocks.

Annexation of Muttock— In the meantime Captain Vetch succeeded to the office of Political Agent and Hannay was placed in sole command of the Assam Light Infantry.⁽¹⁾ Both agreed that the rule of the Senapati could not be imposed on the Morans against their wishes. Instead of imposing a money tribute of any assumed amount, Vetch, however, recommended a fresh census and a new settlement on the basis of the agreement originally concluded by Scott.⁽²⁾ On the approval of these measures by the Government of India⁽³⁾ in November 1839, he proceeded to Muttock with a view to effect a settlement. In a conference held at Tiphook, the headquarters of the Gosain of the Morans, the latter emphatically declared their unwillingness to accept the rule of Maju Gohain or any of his family. The breach was found to be gradually widening and therefore Vetch resolved on the separation of the Morans from the Muttocks. On such a condition, the sons of the Senapati expressed their unanimous reluctance to accept the management; none of them volunteered to assume the charge,⁽⁴⁾ if they were to be deprived of their jurisdiction over the Morans.

(1) I.P.C. 3 Apr. 1839, No. 118.

(2) I.P.C. 14 Aug., 1839, No. 105; Jenkins to the Government of India.

(3) I.P.C. 14 Aug., 1839, No. 106.

(4) I.P.C. 26 Dec., 1839, Nos. 74-75; Vetch to Jenkins, 28 Nov. 1839.

Consequently Muttock was annexed and placed under the jurisdiction of the officer in charge of Lakhimpur. Later the headquarters of both the districts were removed to Dibrugarh. (1)

It would appear that the annexation of Muttock was effected through the sheer opposition of a section of the people, who in no way represented the sentiments of the country. The people of Lower Muttock and the refugees settling between the Buri Dihing and the Dibru had nothing to say against a rule which was democratic as well as benevolent. Muttock was allowed her independence on sufferance; at any rate so long as she furnished the sinews of war against the hostile tribes. The substitution of the Doaneahs for these "doubtful contingents" gradually removed their indispensability, while the affairs at Sadiya disillusioned the Government once and for all in regard to any reliance previously placed in these auxiliaries. The flower of the Muttock contingent now placed themselves under the protection of the Government; as such the independence of the Senapatīs was not only injurious to the Morans but detrimental to the interests of the Government.

IV. The Resumption of Bhutan Duars.

The situation on the Bhutan frontier continued to deteriorate. While the tribute remained unpaid, in the duars oppression, plunder and murder of persons even those in authority or of responsibility had become affairs of constant occurrence. In January 1839, Gambhir Uzir, the officer in charge of Kalling duar was treacherously murdered, his property looted and his family carried off to the hills. The reason for this outrage was that he had prohibited the entry of criminals into his jurisdiction in deference to the wishes of the British Government.⁽¹⁾

Later, Joradea Moholea, a thakuria of Buriguma was plundered and reduced to beggery on the grounds that he had aided, against the orders of the Bhutan officers, the capture of a gang of dacoits.⁽²⁾ Towards the close of April 1839, some chiefs of Koreapara, known as the 'Sath Rajas' murdered Madhu Saikia, the revenue collector of Orung on account of his insistence upon a new arrangement in tribute recently introduced by the Government.⁽³⁾ Despite constant representations made by the local authorities, the government of Bhutan showed little inclination to deliver up the criminals nor to liquidate the arrears of tribute.

(1) I.P.C. 27 Mar., 1839, No. 18; Matthie to Jenkins, 4 Jan. '39.

(2) I.P.C. 13 Nov. 1839, No. 73; Ensign Scott to Jenkins, 19 Sept. '39.

(3) I.P.C. 13 May, 1839, No. 113; Ensign Scott to Jenkins, 27 Apr., '39.

Failure of Pemberton's Mission - Pemberton was deputed to the Court of Bhutan in the belief that the Deb and the Dharma Rajas were kept in ignorance of the proceedings in the duars by the frontier officers. The mission, however, proved a failure. While Pemberton was on his way to the seat of the Government, a revolution took place in Bhutan which enabled the then Deb to seize power by expelling his predecessor. But a counter revolution was already in preparation. The authorities in Bhutan therefore felt so insecure, that they did not venture to accede to even minor arrangements if a person of importance thought fit to object to them. (1) Describing the manner in which they attempted to evade his proposals, Pemberton reported:

"In many protracted discussions held with the Ministers of the Deb, every argument was used, the most detailed explanations were offered, to arrest the attention of the Government and to show the extreme hazard incurred by the misconduct of its officers. Various propositions were submitted and discussed and the Draft Treaty was at last prepared with the avowed concurrence and approval of the Deb and his Ministers, who repeatedly admitted, both in private and at the public durbars, that its provisions were unobjectionable; - the Deb to the last admitting that he had no valid objection to offer and that it was calculated to benefit his country by removing many existing causes of dissatisfaction and yet he avowed that he dared not sign it, as the Tongso Pilo objected." (2)

Consequently, so far as the immediate objectives were concerned the mission achieved nothing. Pemberton, however, acquired a mass of valuable information on the geography, statistics and natural history of the region. (2) both by his personal exertions and

(1) I.P.C. 27 Mar. 1839, No. 82; See also Pemberton: Bootan, pp.94-95.

through the able assistance of Dr. Griffith and Lieut. Blake. Furthermore, he threw much light not only on the nature of the government, but also on its resources and external relations. In particular he revealed that the Deb and Dharma Rajas were practically powerless and that the real authority of the country was vested in two barons - Tongso and Paro Pilos, the former governing the territories adjacent to the duars in Assam, the latter those connected with the duars in Bengal.

Resumption of the Duars - The failure of Pemberton's mission coupled with a belief that further negotiations under existing circumstances would be hopeless led to a resolution by the Governor General in Council in March 1839 to resume the Assam Duars, while the convulsions continued in Bhutan. Jenkins was accordingly authorized to occupy them; should he be unable to take over all the duars, he was instructed to select those which could be most easily held during all seasons. ⁽¹⁾

It was not then the opportune moment for such action. The removal of the Sebundis and other troops to the East after the outbreak at Sadiya, made it highly inexpedient during the rains to complicate matters in the duars. With the approach of the cold season, however, the tense situation in the North-East considerably eased and in the meanwhile the arrival of reinforcements from Jamalpur enabled Jenkins to avail himself of the

(1) I.P.C. 27 Mar., 1839, No. 82.

services of the Sebundies exclusively for duties in the North. In Oct. 1839, therefore, the duar Koreapura was attached. At the same time, those of Buriguma and Kalling were not restored as usual to the Bhuteah officials at the expiry of four months. To guard against an aggressive move by the Bhuteahs, immediate measures had to be taken by Lieut. Sturt, who was then placed in charge of the attached duars.⁽¹⁾

The annexation of the duars at the hour of Bhutan's domestic troubles apparently compromised the prestige of the British Government. The authorities in Bhutan, however, had no rights over the duars except under the terms of the arrangement with the British authorities and the fact that they had failed to fulfil the terms of the contract through non-payment of tribute and by permitting acts of aggression had forfeited their claims. Their misgovernment desolated the duars, which had become the rendezvous of the dacoits and escaped criminals. No individual could with safety assist in bringing them to justice, nor was the government of Bhutan strong enough to control the insubordinate officials who had countenanced and supported the criminals. The British Government, as the paramount power had therefore the duty, not merely the right, to give the protection, which their vassals could not afford, to their subjects.

Soon after the attachment of the duars the ryots were found emigrating into British possessions. It was due

(1) I.P.C. 13 Nov. 1839, Nos. 74-75.

partly to the imposition of taxes on hearth and plough @ Re.1/- and Rs. 3/- respectively in lieu of the miscellaneous collections which were previously made in kind. On account of their difficulties in converting their produce into money the taxes fell heavily on the poorer ryots. ⁽¹⁾ The desertions were, however, occasioned mainly by the fear of the ryots, that with the restoration of the duars they would again come under the domination of the Bhuteahs. ⁽²⁾ The hearth tax was immediately reduced by a half. At the same time the local authorities strongly recommended that these duars should be declared permanently annexed. They represented that if Bhutan was again allowed to exercise power, the whole of the inhabitants would flee and that many, who had previously fled, would then be unwilling to return through the uncertainty as to the future control of the duars. ⁽³⁾

Apart from this, it was also the view of the Government that the possession, which was held by the Bhutan Government for a certain portion of each year gave them no title to claim them as their own territory. ⁽⁴⁾ In fact, the attention of the Government was soon drawn to the question of the annexation of all the duars in Assam. The situation in the Bhutan government was drifting towards further confusion. To the scramble for power in the hills there was added a party strife between two

(1) I.P.C. 13 Apr. 1840, Nos. 125-7.

(2) I.P.C. 13 July, 1840, Nos. 113-4.

(3) Ibid. 26 Apr. 1841, Nos. 47-50.

(4) I.P.C. 20 Sept. 1841, Nos. 73-4.

chiefs - Durga Deb and Hurgobind Katma, for the possession of certain tracts in the duars of Bengal.⁽¹⁾ Under these circumstances, Jenkins felt that the deputation of another envoy might be attended with a more successful result than was obtained by the late mission. In making this suggestion to the Government of India he remarked "If our envoy was unable to prevail on the Bootan Government to accept our aid generally, I should have no hesitation in immediately occupying all the Dooars, both of Assam and Bengal and preparations for that event should be made when the officer proposed to be deputed moved up to Bootan."⁽²⁾ The Supreme Government however saw little prospect of obtaining a valid cession of the rights of Bhutan in the Assam duars from any competent authority and was therefore opposed to the idea of embroiling themselves in the internecine strife in Bhutan. "The fruitless mission of this kind," Lord Auckland observed, "will only tend to aggravate our embarrassments and are not creditable to the British power."⁽³⁾

In the despatch of 11 May, 1841, the Court of Directors to whose consideration the subject was previously referred, concurred in the view taken by the Government of India of its rights to exercise a controlling power over the duars in Assam.⁽⁴⁾

(1) I.P.C. 20 July, 1840, Nos. 110-13; 14 Sept. No. 64; See also Eden, Political Mission to Bootan, pp. 20-21

(2) I.P.C. 12 Apr. 1841, Nos. 75-76.

(3) I.P.C. 14 June, 1841, Nos. 83-86; 26 July, 1841, Nos. 81-82.

(4) C.D. 11 May, 1841, No. 12, Paras 19-24.

Strengthened by their support combined with the reports of increased disorganisation and confusion in the remaining duars, the Governor General in Council resolved in September 1841 on the permanent annexation of all the duars in Assam.⁽¹⁾ The local authorities were subsequently authorized to grant compensation to the Bhuteah authorities to the extent of one third of the net revenue derived from the duars.⁽²⁾ Accordingly, towards the close of the year, the order was carried into effect and arrangements were made for the defence of the frontier.⁽³⁾ On the intimation of the intentions of the Government, the Deb, Dharma Rajas and Tongso Pilo made constant representations to the Government for the restoration of the duars persisting in their refusal to share any portion of the revenue allotted to them.⁽⁴⁾ But the frontier chiefs when convinced that the Government was determined not to make over and even, if restored, the ryots would leave them, came to terms and accepted the compensation as sanctioned by the Government.⁽⁵⁾

(1) I.P.C. 6 Sept. 1841, Nos. 69-70.

(2) I.P.C. 12 Oct. 1842, Nos. 79-81.

(3) I.P.C. 20 Dec. 1841, Nos. 100-1; 17 Jan. 1842, Nos. 79-81; 7 Feb. 1842, Nos. 86-7.

(4) I.P.C. 28 June, 1843, No. 141-3.

(5) I.P.C. 20 Apr. 1844, Nos. 130-2; 14 May, Nos. 88-90. Thus early in 1844 the chiefs of Koreapara entered into an agreement by which they commuted their claims for a payment of Rs. 5,000; about the same time, Charduar Bhuteahs, the Sath Rajas, entered into a similar treaty for a payment of Rs. 1740.

V. Towards Conciliation.

In the meanwhile, there had been a definite change in the policy of the Government towards the frontier chiefs. Jenkins' forward policy, to subjugate them by bringing the frontier districts under direct control, was not approved by the Government of India. From past experience, it was obvious to them that the farther the detachments were pushed forward, not only were they removed from their sources of supply and support but entangled themselves with several tribes and their intricate problems, which resulted in nothing but jealousy and suspicion to be followed by their disaffection and hostilities. Instead of following them to their hills and fastnesses, it was therefore felt expedient to remain on the defensive and to bring them to reason by friendly intercourse and the removal of the causes, whatever they might be, which had occasioned their hostility.⁽¹⁾ The rôle of the Government was henceforth to become that of peacemaker not of conqueror.

Thus, in the middle of 1840, in reply to Jenkins' proposal for a punitive expedition into the Garo hills against one of the turbulent tribes, the Governor General observed: "The indiscriminate resort to military force in these distressing occasions may inspire the barbarian inhabitants with a dread of the power of the British Government but its exhibition should

(1) I.P.C. 5 June, 1839, Nos. 86-88.

be reserved for great and rare occasions which may justify the adoption of measures of general retribution. It rarely happens but that petty military expeditions directed against uncivilized tribes are conducted with a fierceness which at once provokes retaliation and is contrary to all our feelings of humanity and honourable warfare."⁽¹⁾

Expedition against the Meerees - It appears that the Governor General was inspired to these just and humane sentiments by the conduct of Mr Driver, the Sub-Assistant of Lakhimpur. In March 1840 to punish a tribe of Hill Meerees for a dacoity committed in the district, Driver, penetrating into the hills forced the inhabitants to flee into the jungles, burnt the village to the ground and shot eight of them. On his return, he was waylaid in a difficult pass by numberless Meerees of the neighbouring villages. He succeeded, however, in scaling the heights and driving them from their positions. A retaliatory measure of this nature could not escape the notice of the Government and Jenkins was instructed to inculcate into his subordinates the expectation of the Government that they should not resort to force to gain redress for border forays, excepting after failure of every effort at conciliation.⁽²⁾

The Surrender of Thagi Raja - To act merely on the defensive proved however extremely difficult. The uncivilized and rude

(1) See C.D. 2 June, 1841, No. 17. paras 12-14

(2) I.P.C. 24 Apr. 1840, Nos. 85 & 86.

policy that prevailed among these tribes prevented them from understanding such action on the part of the Government, since they appeared to acknowledge no law but that of physical superiority. In spite of the greatest reluctance, coercive measures had to be sanctioned in September 1841 against the Akas who had carried away three ryots from Balipara. The liberation of the captives made it incumbent on the Government to despatch an expedition; but stringent instructions were issued to the officer in command to avoid unnecessary violence and to endeavour, if possible, to effect the object of the expedition by peaceful means. ⁽¹⁾

The negotiations, subsequently carried on by Ensign Scott, the officer in charge of Darrang had a quite unexpected result. In February 1842, Thagi Raja, the arch enemy of the British, offered his unconditional surrender and Jenkins took the earliest opportunity to come to an agreement. The atrocities committed by the Akas in 1835 under their valiant chief seemed to demand severe retribution - in fact, a price of Rs.500 had been offered for his head. But he now received a stipend of Rs. 20/- for it was felt expedient to treat these uncivilized tribes with greater forbearance. ⁽²⁾ It appeared that the Government preferred the correction of their barbarian habits to the exhibition of military strength.

Bigges's Peace Mission - A true exponent of this new policy was

(1) I.P.C. 27 Sept., 1841, Nos. 95-96.

(2) I.P.C. 14 Feb. 1842, Nos. 111-12; 30 Mar, Nos. 114-16.

Lieutenant Bigge, the officer in charge of Nowgong. He felt convinced that conciliation was better than half-hearted coercion. In spite of the two expeditions of Grange, when it was found that the Angamis remained unsubdued, Bigge volunteered himself to proceed to the hills on a peace mission with a view to open up friendly intercourse and to induce the Naga chiefs to abstain from further inroads. (1) A suggestion of this kind naturally received the approval and highest appreciation from the Government. In fact, it was considered a far more satisfactory proof of good management on the part of the British functionaries in Assam, that these people should be reclaimed by kind and gentle treatment. "The object might be obtained" it was observed to Bigge, "by maintaining a friendly and frequent intercourse with the Naga chiefs, by periodical visits to their principal places of residence and by encouraging them to frequent the fairs and markets that might be judiciously established on the frontier of their territories, where they might barter the products of their own hills for other commodities of which they stand in need." (2)

Early in 1841, Bigge set out on his mission. Moving about leisurely from village to village, he endeavoured by presents and conciliatory means to bring the chiefs about him and succeeded fairly in gaining their confidence. Near Semkhar he made his first settlement with the Nagas who had recently come

(1) I.P.C. 3 Aug. 1840, Nos. 93-94; 28 Dec. No. 65.

(2) I.P.C. 12 Apr. 1841, No. 80.

(1)
 under the protection of the Government. He won over the Rengmas and their chief Gasinga Phukan expressed his readiness to offer tribute of ivory as an acknowledgement of sovereignty. He renewed the engagements with the chiefs of Ika^q and Impang and thereby confirmed their previous allegiance. Bigge conducted his whole tour with a firmness combined with consideration for their prejudices, so that there was nothing to excite the Nagas, whose stronghold he reached without any opposition. He suggested to the Government, that the Rengmas should be ^{concilia} ~~propriated~~ by granting them the lands, which they were said (2) to have held under the former government, that it was inexpedient to bring these tribes under the direct control of the Government; "As to the deriving any revenue," he added "should be out of the question, when conciliation and the establishment of good feeling were the sole objects." (3)

The judgment and ability with which Bigge performed his mission earned for him the approbation of the Government. His measures towards the Rengmas were approved, but as a mark of their subjection, it was felt highly expedient that some acknowledgement, however trifling and however rarely made, should be required of them. Therefore, Jenkins was instructed to avail himself of the earliest opportunity to insist upon

(1) I.P.C. 21 Dec. 1840, Nos. 67-69.

(2) These lands of 'Khats' as they were called were situated in the district of Morung.

(3) I.P.C. 19 July, 1841, Nos. 104-5; Bigge to Jenkins, 7 June, '41.

the Angamis submitting their "proofs of fidelity", for it was felt to be the only method by which the protective authority of the Government could be introduced among those rude tribes. ⁽¹⁾

Bronson's Mission - The same policy of peaceful penetration seems to have been followed in relation to the Nagas who inhabited the hills south of Sibsagar. While Bigge was engaged in his peace mission in the land of the Angamis, Mr Bronson, a missionary, endeavoured to introduce civilization to the Nagas by teaching them Christianity. ⁽²⁾ After learning their language he ventured to reside in their midst and started a school at Namsang, a village near Jaypur. "It was difficult indeed to maintain a school among such wild people because the pupils refused to gather at a given hour, and their untamed habits were not easily subjected to school rules and discipline.... the progress of education was therefore slow; but men young and old finally came to the missionary and were soon made acquainted with the rudiments of learning. Evening schools were held for those who worked and could not attend during the day; and before long the pupils looked forward in anticipation to the study period." ⁽³⁾

Bronson felt it necessary to instruct the Nagas in industrial arts in addition to the Bible. He pressed the Government to offer them facilities for improving the production

(1) Ibid. No. 105.

(2) I.P.C. 11 May, 1840, Nos. 128-29.

(3) Sword, V.K. Baptists in Assam, pp. 61-63.

of tea and salt; only by such training he pointed out could their morals and economy be improved and they themselves brought more and more into touch with the Government. "For objects of practical utility" connected with the improvement of the Nagas a monthly grant of Rs.100/- was made to Bronson. Unfortunately, ill-health cut short his programme and in less than a year he had to quit the hills. However, Bronson left a deep impression on the Nagas, who never failed to show their gratitude by their humble offerings. ⁽¹⁾

Tours conducted by Brodie and Vetch in the Naga Hills - Like the Angamis, the Nagas in the East of Dhamsiri were also divided into a number of warring clans; it was not an uncommon occurrence for the inhabitants of one village to be attacked and indiscriminately slaughtered by their neighbours, not in one place but all along the frontier, affecting occasionally the peace of the bordering plain. ⁽²⁾ The evils of their internecine strife drew the attention of Brodie, the officer in charge of Sibsager, immediately after the resumption of Upper Assam. In early 1840, he had to depute Mr Strong, his assistant, to go to Jaypur to enquire into a long-standing quarrel arising out of a dispute over salt wells, between the Nagas of Namsang and Borduar. ⁽³⁾ Brodie went personally into the hills the following year and settled a dispute that was

(1) I.P.C. 11 May, 1840, Nos. 128-9; 9 Nov., No. 82.

(2) Selections of Papers regarding the Hill Tracts between Assam & Burma, pp. 286-7.

(3) B.J.C. (criminal) 9 Apr. 1840, No. 18.

going on between the tribes of Jabakan and Banfera. At the same time he entered into engagements with two powerful chiefs in the neighbourhood of Moolung and Chengnoi.⁽¹⁾

In March 1841, Some people of the plains were killed by the Nagas of the duars Terro and Kapang.⁽²⁾ This was followed by another murder, a few months after on the Dhodar Ali,⁽³⁾ for which the Moolung clan was held responsible. Since 1840 Brodie had solicited Government's sanction for certain "authoritative rules" to deal with the Nagas; but the attitude of the Government was then one of indifference to the affairs of these tribes. This succession of outrages however, compelled them to intervene; Brodie was directed to proceed to the hills and take such action as might lead to the prevention of similar activities in future; he was also to suggest, if possible, means to put an end to the system of exterminating warfare prevailing among these rude people.⁽⁴⁾

Accordingly, in January 1842, Brodie commenced his tour in the hills between the rivers Dikhow and Buridihing. He visited the chief of Moolung and compelled him to pay a fine for the outrage recently committed and to enter into an agreement for future good conduct. Engagements were also made with the chiefs

(1) Selection of Papers etc. pp. 286-8; Brodie to Jenkins 15 Sept. 1841, No. 5.

(2) Ibid.

(3) One of the main highways in the South of the Sibsagar district, constructed by the former government.

(4) Selection of Papers, etc. pp. 256-75; Brodie to Jenkins, 9 Apr. 1842.

of Tabiung, Jaktong, Jabaka, Banfera, Kulung, Paniduar and Borduar, by which all agreed to abstain from outrages in the plains, to be responsible for the surrender of offenders within the territory of their duars, to discontinue hostilities with each other, leaving the British Government to punish attacks made upon themselves and finally to abstain from selling Naga children as slaves into the British territories. ⁽¹⁾

About the same time, Captain Vetch, the officer in charge of Lakhimpur made a similar tour in the hills east of Buri Dihing. His visit prevented further attempts on the part of the Khamtis to create disorder on the frontier, put an end to some existing tribal feuds and did much to keep the frontier tranquil. ⁽²⁾

In 1844, Brodie undertook another tour in the hills between the rivers Dikhow and Dayang. He found the Nagas, as he advanced eastwards, no better than "drunken rabbles" with marked differences in their habits and institutions. He came across in each village a dozen of aspirants for power and every day he witnessed brawls between rivals, which at times threatened to become serious collisions. He went constantly in apprehension of an outbreak; however, nothing untoward happened as he conducted the whole tour with great forbearance. He gained the support of the chief of Tabiung and recommended for him the grant of some

(1) Ibid. This last practice was said to have been of daily occurrence even under the rule of Raja Purandar Singha.

(2) Selection of Papers, etc. pp. 275-83; Vetch to Jenkins
8 June, '42.

lands in lieu of the khats which he had held under the former government. He won over the chiefs of the Sema Nagass, another powerful chief, to whom facilities were offered for trading with the plains. Agreements were also made with the chiefs of Oormung, Asiringias, Laso, Buragaon, Campungia, Munsing, Kolabaria and the Karis.⁽¹⁾

Notwithstanding these measures of conciliation, for years to come, the eastern frontier remained disturbed. Internecine strife still continued. It had become in fact, all the more necessary to maintain the influence so far gained by the repetitions of similar deputations so as to enable the tribes to prefer their complaints and to take notice of possible breaches of the engagements. The tours and agreements however, repressed the feuds which had previously been of continuous occurrence and rendered the country quieter, especially when it was found that justice would even reach such inaccessible wilds. Equally promising were the results of the endeavours, however temporary, to encourage these rude tribes to frequent the markets and fairs in the plains so as to relinquish their predatory habits. Early in 1844, almost all the Khamti insurgents made their submission to Captain Vetch, who located them carry on a village a (2) (to/peaceful pursuits at Chunpura, a few miles north of Sadiya.

(1) Ibid. pp. 295-307; Brodie to Jenkins, 6 Aug. '44.

(2) I.P.C. 18 May, 1844, Nos. 175-80.

About the same time the Charduar Bhuteahs, who had been declared outlaws since the murder of Madhu Saikia, were re-admitted into friendly alliance on their agreement to renounce all former claims in commutation for a payment in money. (1) Many of the Duflas had already taken land in the plains and ~~and~~ become Government ryots. (2) The opening of the hill duars and the removal of all restrictions brought down a number of Nagas who had never previously come to the plains for the purpose of trade. Even the Angamis, whose traffic hitherto had consisted mainly in slaves commenced a barter trade of their own produce in exchange for those necessities from the markets of the plains which they required. (3) "Consequences are beginning to be felt" reported Jenkins, "in the advance of traders to the most distant frontier villages and the confidence with which European gentlemen have been lately residing among the Singphos employed in cultivating the fine Tea plantations of Koojog and Jogundo;" "and I feel assured" he added "that by the establishment of a strong post at Ningroo, by opening out roads to it from Jaipur and Rungagora (the headquarters of Muttock) and by the occasional residence there during the cold season of the Political Agent or other officer, that the whole of these eastern districts will soon be reduced to entire submission, and from having been

(1) I.P.C. 11 May, 1844, Nos. 88-90.

(2) I.P.C. 12 Aug. 1843, Nos. 107-110.

(3) See Mackenzie, A: North East Frontier of Bengal, p. 113; Selection of Papers, etc. pp. 290-1; Jenkins, 18 June, '42

never-ceasing causes of watchfulness, expense and anxiety, will begin to add to the productive resources and wealth of the province, and from giving us the means of commanding the passes towards Ava, will contribute to our military strength and political supremacy."⁽¹⁾

(1) Selection of Papers, etc. pp. 255-6; Jenkins to Bushby, 18 June, 1842.

CHAPTER NINE

C O N C L U S I O N

With the annexation of Upper Assam and the Bhutan duars, the whole of Assam came under the direct rule of the British Government. The province was already divided into manageable districts, which had in the meantime assumed roughly their present shape with popular names - Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsager and Lakhimpur, in place of former conventional ones - Lower, Central and Upper Assam. The Principal Assistant with his subordinate continued to perform the duties of a magistrate, judge and collector. To effect proper supervision and to meet emergencies, two Junior Assistants were added in (1) 1839; at the same time the Commissioner was considerably relieved of his heavy duties by the creation of the new office of the Deputy Commissioner with headquarters at Gauhati. A distinct office was created for the command of the Assam Light Infantry (2) while the duties of the political relations with the frontier tribes, hitherto performed by the Political Agent, were now entrusted to the officer in charge of the district of Lakhimpur.

(1) In 1861, these officers were graded into Deputy Commissioners of the first, second and third class and Assistant Commissioners. The Sub-Assistant or Extra-Assistants as they were sometimes called were all styled as Extra Assistant Commissioners.

(2) B.J.D. 14 June 1836, No. 1; I.P.C. 16, Jan. 1839 Nos. 45-46; 23 Jan. No. 11; P.L.I.B. 26 Aug. 1839, No. 65.

In the opinion of some contemporaries, British rule was not an unmixed blessing; Maniram Dewan, an exponent of the official aristocracy averred "We are just now as it were in the belly of a tiger; if our misfortunes yielded any advantage to the Government we should be content, but the fact is there is neither gain to the people nor to the Government." According to him, the evils of the system were the consequence of the "introduction of new customs and new courts", "an unjust system of taxation" and the "objectional treatment of the Hill tribes."⁽²⁾

"Introduction of new Courts and Customs" - Let us examine these charges

- (1) Anandaram Dhekial Phuken, the Sub-Assistant and a leading Assamese of the time made the following observations to Mr. A.J. Moffatt Mills, who visited Assam in 1854: "That notwithstanding the superiority of the British system of administration it is not in its present form so well adapted to the peculiar conditions and habits of the people as could reasonably be expected from the liberal and free Constitution of England." Mills, Report on the Province of Assam, 1854, Appendix J, page 31.
- (2) See Mills, Report on Assam; Petition of Maneeram, Appendix, K.B. paras 1st and 7th. An influential and highly capable man Maniram Dutta Barua Dewan (1806-58) served as a Sheristadar and Tahsildar under Captain Neufville. It was through his assistance many of the financial abuses under Colonel Cooper's régime were reformed in Upper Assam. He continued in his office until about the end of Purandar's reign. In the complete overhauling of the administration, which was effected after the resumption, he was reported to have received an unfavourable deal at the hands of Brodie. In utter disgust, he resigned from his post and became a reactionary. At the time of the mutiny, he was found in an attempt at the restoration of Kandarpeswar Singha, the grandson of Purandar; he was sentenced to death in Feb. 1858.

one by one. It may be true that under the former Government, justice was rough but very speedy. All complaints were heard viva voce and prompt punishment followed if the defendant failed to make a satisfactory answer to the charge without further delay for witnesses. Under the existing system, a party even with a petty complaint could not expect to obtain relief without submitting to a course of vexatious procedure; and even if he obtained an award in his favour, its execution was attended with so many obstacles that he might actually be compelled to give up all hope of satisfaction. Apart from this, the European officers, who were expected to examine the witnesses themselves, were burdened with so many and multifarious duties and the Lower Courts were so inundated with cases, that it became physically impossible to examine the witnesses that daily flocked to the Courts. Inevitably the duty fell on the Sheristadar; he in turn, unless the case was of importance, delegated the task to a subordinate Amlah, who not infrequently handed it over to one of the unpaid candidates (omedars) for office who frequented the Courts.⁽¹⁾ As these people were paid by the party at whose instance the witnesses were summoned, there was reason to suspect that "truth was transformed into falsehood and falsehood into truth."

The administration of justice in India as a whole presented many grounds for criticism and much scope for reform.⁽²⁾ Certain defects in procedure in a country unused to it coupled

(1) Mills, Report on Assam, Appendix J, pp. 40-49.

(2) Parliamentary Papers, 1853, see Minutes of Evidence, vol. I, pp. 98-111.

the inadequate number of higher officers were the cause of some evils; but the decisions of the European functionaries themselves were reported to have given highest satisfaction to the people by their justice, uprightness and impartiality.⁽¹⁾

Above all, the court of justice was now free and humane; even Maniram had to admit that by abolishing the cruel practices of cutting off nose and ears, extracting eyes and other form of torture or mutilation, the British Government had "earned for itself inestimable praise and renown" from the people of Assam.⁽²⁾

"Unjust system of Taxation" - The odious system of taxing one by hearth, head or house or on account of one's caste or profession was abolished in all the districts by 1837-38.⁽³⁾ In the subsequent settlements, the results of the recent experience were taken into account as far as possible and the various errors committed in the earlier years were carefully avoided. Although proprietary right was not formally conceded, virtually every ryot in Assam was the absolute master of his own land, which he could sell, mortgage, inherit or otherwise dispose of. No ryot could be dispossessed of any portion of the lands except by the regular process in the courts.

Uniformity, however, was nowhere to be seen either in the rate of assessments, or in the period of settlement.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Mills; Report on Assam, Appendix J. p. 49.

(2) Ibid; Appendix K.B. para 7th.

(3) B.R.L. 17 Aug. 1837, No. 17; In Darrang and Nowgong these taxes were abolished in 1836-37, while in Kamrup in the following year.

(4) See Appendix B.

The assessments were usually made at the Sadr Town on the report of petty officials, and only in cases of doubt or dispute was there any local investigation; even there it was conducted not by the Collector or his Assistant - neither of whom had time for it - but by one of the subordinate officials. "A settlement formed in this manner," reported Mills, the Judge of the Sadr Court, "is a misnomer and no settlement at all." "I am inclined to place every confidence" he added "in the supervision of the local authorities, yet I cannot but doubt the accuracy of information of the measurements conducted by persons more interested to be dishonest." ⁽¹⁾ While there was every possibility of defrauding the Government by ~~concealing~~ lands, the existing system afforded ample scope to the revenue official to transfer, with sinister motives, land from one ryot to another, or to cause an overassessment or eventually make a secret pact on his own account.

"Objectionable Treatment of Hill Tribes"- It cannot be denied, that at the beginning the Government was forced to adopt measures of retaliation, even with a certain amount of ruthlessness to repel incursions and to reduce to submission some of the obstinate highlanders. Obviously, ^{necessities} ~~measures~~ compelled the tribes; but they had overstepped their limits and often committed acts of aggression, which a civilized Government worthy of the name

(1) Mills: Report on Assam, p. 7.

must have resisted. It certainly redounds to the credit of the Government that it soon realised, that a conciliatory policy was more effective than the establishment of a number of military posts in turning these obdurate mountaineers to a speedier reconciliation. The consequent turn in policy and the result thereof has been alluded in the earlier chapter. Unfortunately, but definitely against the wishes of the early administration^{OKs}, there had been a marked setback in the intercourse and the process of assimilation which had been going on for ages between the people of the hills and those of the plains; the explanation of which was to be sought not in the rulers so much as in the factors mainly extraneous which came in the train of the British Government.

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- (1) Robinson: A Descriptive Account of Assam pp. 226, 242 & 345; Pemberton: Eastern frontier of British India, pp. 81-82; According to Robinson, commercial intercourse with the hill tribes was "inconsiderable". The trade with Bhutan which Buchanan estimated in 1803 at two lacs, had so suffered on account of the strained relations with the Government that in 1833 only two merchants came down from the hills. The importation of foreign salt drove the Nagas from their markets and thus deprived them of continuing their previous intimate contacts with the Assamese. The Khasias retired to the hills after their expulsion from the duars and few cases were later heard of their conversion to Hinduism.

Official Aristocracy suffered - The worst sufferers under the British were doubtless the upper and the middle classes - men who had been enjoying the loaves and fishes under the former government. The reasons were not far to seek. In Assam the avenues to employment were (even^{as} now) very few. There were no professional lawyers, merchants, bankers or even the number of shopkeepers that were to be found elsewhere; the influential section of the people therefore entirely depended on the Government for their livelihood. With the entry of the outsiders they were thrown out of employment; with the sequestration of the pykes they were levelled to the "dead level of ordinary ryots"; and with the abolition of slavery, which constituted their sole property, they were reduced to abject misery.⁽¹⁾

Men of rank, who had hitherto guided the destinies of the country, were now elbowed out of their places by a number of interlopers from below. Those who had hitherto been generous donors to the pious and the pundits were now relegated to the position of supplicants for a mere pittance.⁽²⁾ Inevitably "those whose

(1) I.P.C. 6 Mar. 1839, No. 143; Jenkins to the Government of India. 21 Feb. '39. Slavery was abolished in the British possessions by Act V, 1843.

(2) The utter destitution to which many of the higher families were reduced could be seen from the entreaties made by them to Captain Jenkins in Feb. 1838, when he visited Upper Assam. Even ladies of rank, some with their grown-up daughters, approached him beseeching the Company's liberality either to give their daughters in marriage or to have a mere livelihood. The mother of ex-Raja Rajeswar Singha (1751-1770) a highly respectable but old and infirm lady had expressed to Jenkins, that he was the first Sahib before whom she had ever appeared and that circumstances now compelled her to do so most unwillingly. See Journal of Captain Jenkins, paras 119-26, 133, 144-45.

ancestors never lived by digging or ploughing and carrying (1)
burdens are now nearly reduced to such degrading employments."

The reaction of Maniram was therefore natural. It cannot however be denied that the Government was highly solicitous to ameliorate their condition. Scott's anxiety to provide these nobles thus affected with pensions and posts was prompted by policy as well as generosity. Even Robertson, who had held a very poor opinion of the natives, hardly attempted to dislodge the nobility from their revenue charges. On the other hand, Jenkins was out and out sympathetic to the ancient families and in fact, his attachment to their cause may be attributed to a great extent to the fall of Purandar. How to employ the former officials - that again was the earliest concern of the Government after resumption. It was with that object that the whole country was parcelled out into innumerable revenue divisions - the mouzes - and over each was placed a man of former rank. (2) The resources and the scope of the Government being strictly limited or being incompatible with their existing acquirements, the problem received but a partial solution.

The Rise of the Lower Orders - The change of government in any country is invariably attended with hardship to some class, and Assam was not an exception. The levelling tendency of the British Government however afforded

(1) Mills: Report on Assam; Petition of Maneeram. Appendix K.B.
p. 48.

(2) I.P.C. 26 Dec. 1838, No. 94.

ample opportunities to those who ~~had been~~ ^{had} looked down on the former government. With the abolition of the taxes in caste and professions, the Braziers, silk weavers, and potters whose industries were practically paralysed got a filip to improve and increase their production. (1) Jenkins says that the community of the fishermen (The Domes) was rapidly rising. (2) Not only did they monopolise the carrying trade/in fish, considered to be the most lucrative in the province, but the whole of the barter trade was also in their hands. Apart from material gain the impact of the enlightened influence of Britain did much to improve the hard lot of the depressed classes by breaking down the rigidity of caste and of many obsolete laws. Even the Muhammedans, who had been greatly despised mainly on account of their faith, now began to improve their position and acquire an influence in the social life of the country. (3)

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- (1) B.R.C. 1 Mar. 1836, No. 40; Brodie to Jenkins 14 Nov. 1835: The silk weavers were greatly benefited by the new impetus to trade. Although there had been an increased production, the price of silk rose up to 20%. Evidently there was a great demand for it and actually, as reported by Robinson, there had been keen competition among merchants to advance money not with the purpose of lowering the price of silk, but simply to have it: See Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam, p. 241.
- (2) Journal of Captain Jenkins, para 142.
- (3) Ibid; paras 131, 139-141; The wearing of shoes which was formerly tabooed, now came into use. The lower communities, not to speak of the Muhammedans, were not allowed to take water from the same place, but through privileged communities by paying for it; such prohibitory laws were now broken. Jenkins had forbidden the use of the term "Garian" (implying one who comes from Gaur or who buries the dead) in public documents, which was previously the usual title given to a Muhammedan.

Towards Material Improvement - It was often said in those days, that the British Government "failed in its efforts to improve in any material degree the conditions and prosperity of the country and even to repair the loss sustained from domestic wars and invasions." (1) This does not mean however that no serious attempt was ever made. In his endeavour for the improvement and extension of the silk industry Scott was undoubtedly actuated by his earnest desire to improve the economic resources of the people. In Darrang, he gave a start to sericulture under the auspices of the Government, and in 1832, 61 puras of land were actually found in cultivation. As the quality of the product was later found to be inferior and not a paying proposition, and at the instance (2) of the Board of Trade, the project was however abandoned.

The serious attention of the Government was soon drawn to the Tea plant - reported to have been discovered in Assam in 1823 by Robert Bruce. (3) In March 1835, to explore the possibilities of Tea culture, the Government of India deputed a scientific mission to Assam under Dr. N. Wallieh, the Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens. On the report and recommendation of the mission, in the next year, an experimental Tea Garden was started at Sadiya under the supervision of Mr. C.A. Bruce, the brother of Robert Bruce. (4) Then the Government themselves became

(1) Mills: Report on Assam, Appendix J. p. 31.

(2) B.P.C. 5 Nov. 1832, No. 53; 27 Feb. 1833, Nos. 83-4.

(3) Assam, Sketch of its History, etc. p. 21.

(4) B.R.C. 11 Feb. 1835, Nos. 3-5; 13 Mar. Nos. 3-7.

the planters, but the operation was considered "strictly experimental." "The Government are ^{to} eventually to withdraw entirely from all ^{the} farther prosecution of the scheme, and, as soon as it may appear to be expedient to entrust its future success to ^{private} ⁽¹⁾ speculators, but not earlier." The time arrived in March 1840, when the charge of the greater portion of the plantation was handed over to the Assam Company, then floated with the object of carrying on the speculation in Tea in Assam. ⁽²⁾

Perhaps the Laissez Faire policy in silk was a blessing in disguise; it enabled the people to excel in it and to have the monopoly till the present day. Notwithstanding every encouragement by the Government by the grant of waste lands at reasonable terms, in the Tea industry, lack of capital was the chief deterrent to the native speculators in the province. Consequently, except as hired labourers, and in a few cases as clerks and manufacturers, few Assamese could derive much benefit from the new enterprise initiated by the Government.

Coal was discovered in 1826 by Wilcox on the bed of the Buni Dihing, south of Borhat and at Daphapani, where he also ⁽³⁾ saw mineral oil. ⁽⁴⁾ Further coal-beds were found at Cherrapunji,

(1) Assam, Sketch of its History etc. pp. 37-38; Parliamentary Papers. vol. 39, 1839 page 96.

(2) Revenue letter from India, 9 Mar. 1840, No. 6; C.A. Bruce; Report on the Manufacture of Tea, and on the extent and produce of Tea plantation in Assam; Tract No. page B.R.C. 7 Oct. 1846, Nos. 14-16.
In March 1840, two-thirds of the Government plantation were handed over to the Assam Company and the remaining portion was made over in October, 1846.

(3) Wilcox, Memoirs of a survey of Assam and the neighbouring country (1825-28); vide Selection of papers regarding Hill Tribes etc. p.5; also Pemberton, Eastern frontier ch. lxx 32-3

(4) B.P.C. 2 July, 1832; Nos. 102-3.

(1) Dharampur and in the Jamuna valley. Limestone was supposed to exist on the right bank of the Kapili river while iron in the Khasia Hills and at Kacharihat, south west of Jorhat. (2) The sources of this mineral wealth were brought to light, but no work was done except at the coal mine in the Khasia Hills. (3)

Abolition of Customs 'Chokeys' - To the difficulties of geography and of navigation in the Brahmaputra, the presence of a number of customs gates effectively checked the commercial activities in Assam. At the customs house at Hadira (Kandahar), the gateway of Assam, opposite to Gowalpara, duties were levied on all exports from Bengal in addition to those paid in the presidency. Likewise, exports of Assam after crossing the hurdle at Hadira, were subjected to the Bengal tariff at the nearest customs house. (4) Beyond Hadira there were dependent chokeys, commanding the outlets to the Brahmaputra, at the different ghats, hats and wherever an opportunity presented itself to levy a tax on the trade between the people of the hills and of the plains. (5)

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- (1) Further discovery of coal beds in Assam; J.A.S.B. 1835, pp. 704-5.
- (2) Pemberton; Report of the Eastern frontier of British India, pp. 82-83.
- (3) P.L.I.B. 14 Jan. 1841; No. 3: It appears from the records that in 1840 from June to September 8325 maunds of coal were despatched to Calcutta.
- (4) Viz: Gowalpara, Moheeah(?), Nagarbera, Dobapara, Samkotta, Nowgong, Boholie (Bihali?) and Benga Bhellenga (?).
- (5) Jamunamukh, Chaparmukh, Morung, Kacharihat, Borhat, Chokey Hat were some of the important interior chokeys. See also Mills; Report on Assam, Appendix K.B. page 67.

In Upper Assam alone, under Raja Purandar, not less than fifty hats or customs divisions existed; where the Hatholders, commonly called the 'Hatkhowas', with a gang of assistants levied duties on every man, woman and children carrying goods through their division, for sale or for their own use. (1)

Hadira was reported to have yielded formerly a revenue of not less than 50,000 a year and even the British Government realised customs on an average of 20,000. (2) Whatever might have been the amount of revenue, the detention of canoes for examination, the forfeitures, penalties and the lack of uniformity in rates together with other sources of embarrassment, were sufficient to deter the most enterprising merchants from entering Assam. (3) Towards the close of 1830, constant representations by Scott led to the abolition of the duties on a number of goods exported from

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- (1) Journal of Captain Jenkins, Paras 81-82; Thus at Borhat, the Government share of the articles that were brought to barter for salt varied from one-seventh to one-fifth and that of the manager was half of that, while another half was collected at the salt wells. Of the salt purchased, out of four pieces, one had to be given to the Raja and another half to the Hatkhowa.
- (2) In 1794, from an official document, the supposed collection was 20,000; while Maniram Dewan estimated it at 60,000; See Bhuyan, S.K. Early British Relations, pp. 67-68; B.R.C. 7 Mar. 1835, No. 81.
- (3) The chokey was usually farmed out to the highest bidder. They were to levy duty at scheduled rates, but in practice they extorted whatever they could. What was worse, the whole trade was their monopoly. They fixed arbitrary prices both on their own goods and those of the merchants from Bengal; See An Account of the Burmese Empire and the Kingdom of Assam (1839) pp. 101-2.

(1)
Assam. His successors, who were almost unanimously against the detached chokey as "a source of great oppression, vexation and delay" regarded the chokey at Hadira of course as essential from a police point of view. (2)
Notwithstanding this, considering the chokey as highly injurious to the commercial and industrial activities of the people of Assam, the Government of India abolished in March 1835 the customs chokeys in the province, both external and internal, and thereby left open and free the trade to and fro from Bengal. (3)

Communications and Works of Public Utility - To facilitate the transit of merchants with their goods should have been the next object of primary importance in developing the resources of the country. Very few provinces in India reported Rutherford "had been provided with such a splendid system of public roads as in Assam; from the great highways which were carried uninterruptedly through the whole country to the great cross-roads between the principal towns and their minute ramifications which connected

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- (1) B.R.C. 7 Mar. 1835, No. 81.
By an order of 30 Dec. 1830, Muga silk, silk, grain and oilseeds from Assam were exempted from duties. Later, the following articles appear to have been added to the tax-free commodities:- Exports - cotton, silk thread or cloth, molasses (Gur), honey and tobacco; Imports - cotton, shells, brass utensils, specially 'Battas' (a kind of tray for offering bettlenut and pan), cloth, European and Chinese goods, cocoanut oil, drums and shoes.
- (2) B.R.C. 7 Mar. 1835, Nos. 81 and 87.
- (3) Ibid. No. 93.

(1) the villages." So long as the former government had been effective these roads were properly maintained; but with the beginning of internal dissensions they were neglected and in consequence overgrown with jungle and had become useless and impassable.

At first the attention of the Government was drawn only to those routes which were of military importance. (2) Furthermore, limited resources combined with the complete subordination of the local authorities to the distant Military Board led the Executive officers at Dacca to delay or even prevent the execution of public works in Assam. (3) An important step was however taken in 1838, when the Military Board recommended a Public Works Department for the province; but not until 1840 was the office

(1) B.R.C. 31 Mar. 1835, No. 2.

Of these the Gohai Kamal Ali, reported to have been constructed by and named after the brother of Koch King Nara Narayan (1534-84), extended from Cooch Behar to Lakhimpur; Bangal Ali from North East Darrang to North Gauhati; Jayantea Road from Jayanteapur to Raha chokey with extension to the bank of the Brahmaputra; Bar Ali Jorhat to Rangpur; Dhai Ali, Rangpur to Panidihing; Raj Ali, Rangpur to Jaypur and Dhodar Ali in the South of the Sibager district; for further information see M'Cosh, Topography, p. 69; B.R.C. 31 Mar. 1835; I.P.C. 20 Feb. 1839, No. 89.

(2) Towards the close of 1827, Mr. Jones surveyed the Sylhet-Gauhati road via Pandua and Cherrapunji and in the following year the Jayantea road was explored and repaired. In 1837-8 considerable improvements were made on the former by throwing several masonry bridges over the rivers Borpani and Bogapani and rendering it perfectly practicable for every description of military force or commissariat cattle. Pemberton: Western frontier of British India, pp. 74-76.

(3) B.J.C. (criminal) 8 Dec. 1835, No. 107.

fully organised with the appointment of two executive officers
 (1) in two divisions. Subsequently a systematic policy was adopted
 for the repair, reconstruction and maintenance of roads and
 other works of public utility. Every year provision was made
 for the restoration of old roads, construction of bridges and
 improvement of the Sadr Towns. In addition magistrates were
 authorized to repair the outposts, hats, halting places,
 'Namghars', clearing of forests and filling up of hollows. (2)
 Appreciating the measures the public cheerfully co-operated;
 the paucity of their means and the scattered character of
 habitation however threw the whole burden on the Government.

Stimulus to Trade - That a great stimulus to trade was the
 immediate consequence of the abolition of the chokeys and the

(1) B.J.C. (criminal) 25 June, 1838, Nos. 52-61; I.P.C. 3 Aug.
 1840, No. 97; Government of India to the Military Board.

(2) Records show that the following works had been under-
 taken and completed during 1840-45; (i) 1839-41 - Repair
 of the Dhai Ali besides the military projects on the
 New Frontier. (ii) 1842 - Construction and repair of roads
 from Gauhati to the river Kallang, Dikhow mukh to
 Sibsager and thence to Jaypur. (iii) 1843 - Road from
 Dibrugarh to Rangagora, Kallang to Kaliabar, Raha to Dabaka;
 opening up a passage from Kaliabar to the river Dhansiri;
 improvements in the towns of Gauhati, Nowgong and Lakhimpur.
 (iv) 1844 - Rebuilding of the 'Namghars' (commonly place
 of worship, but here used as a rest-house) at Jaypur and
 Sibsager, repair of Bor Ali, Dibrugarh-Jaypur road and
 Gauhati to the Kallang. (v) 1845 - Repair of Dhodar Ali
 as far as Garah Ali connecting Jorhat; restoration and
 reconstruction of roads from Lakhimpur to Dhakuakhana, to the
 Lohit, and Ranganadi ghat.

improvements in communication can be seen from the figures of the exports and imports. (See Appendix C). In 1809 the whole trade with Bengal amounted to Rs. 359,200. It is rather difficult to ascertain the exact figures with the abolition of the Hadira chokey; nevertheless, in 1835, the local authorities estimated that the whole traffic exceeded five lakhs; while in 1854, the trade of Gowalpara - the natural entrance to Assam - alone was valued at Rs. 11,97,377 exports and Rs. 10,22,500 imports. (1) Apparently the balance of trade had improved, while in 1809 it was against the province, which had to be paid in gold from the rivers which were auriferous. (2) (3)

Trade was previously confined to a limited range of agricultural produce which were exchanged mainly for the Bengal salt, and the whole traffic was monopolised by the Marwaris. (4) (5) As the cost of countless customs had to be realised, the people of the province had to pay the maximum price while receiving only the minimum profit. (6) With the peaceful settlement of the country

(1) Pemberton; Eastern frontier of British India, pp. 80-1.

(2) See Appendix C ; Mills: Report on Assam; See on Gowaipara pp. 2-3.

(3) Buchanan. An Account of Assam, p. 46

(4) Out of Rs. 228,000 on account of the exports from Bengal into Assam, the amount of salt alone was Rs. 192,000. See Appendix C.

(5) People of Ajmere and Marwar, a province in Rajputana.

(6) See Appendix D.

and the abolition of commercial restrictions not only did the Marwaris set up their 'Golas' (establishments) at every station but also merchants from Upper India, Dacca, Sylhet and other parts of Bengal soon followed suit.⁽¹⁾ To the great benefit of the people, competition in trade gradually resulted in lowering of prices.⁽²⁾ The entire trade however passed under the control of people from outside Assam; the Assamese themselves roused from their torpor rather late had to compete with a class of people who had a born genius for trade.⁽³⁾

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- (1) Mills reported that in 1839 there were only 20 Marwari shops in five Sadr stations; their number increased in 1854 to 84 besides 62 kept by others. Mills; Report on Assam; see report on Sibsager, p. 2. Robinson, Another Chapter on Assam; Calcutta Review, 1853, p.
- (2) This foreign salt, the most important commodity in use, which was previously sold at Rs. 10/- per maund, was available in 1854 @ Rs. 3-14 at Gauhati, Rs. 4-8 at Nowgong and Tezpur and Rs. 5-0 at Sibsager and Dibrugah. Mills; Report on Assam, p. 29.
- (3) "The whole commerce is engrossed by the Marwaris. These enterprising men are stationed in all the principal parts of Assam, and their petty agents stroll about the frontiers wherever there is a chance of making a rupee - bartering salt and other necessaries for lack, gold dust and ivory. These Marwaris must be serious rivals to any European engaging in trade, many such attempts have already failed to establish any profitable agency." M'Cosh; Topography, p. 63.

Therefore, a correct index of the prosperity of the people cannot be deduced entirely from the volume of trade. It can however be reasonably presumed, that the people had recovered to a great extent ^{by 1845,} since they were able to afford to buy articles - foreign textiles, utensils, shoes, sugar, ghee, oil, spices, coconuts, etc. etc. - which had been once the luxuries of only the few. The taxes were also now paid with comparative ease and regularity and the irrecoverable balance became considerable notwithstanding that there had been a rise in the land revenue after the abolition of the capitation tax. ⁽²⁾ In 1844, the revenue of the province, in the words of Captain Jenkins "will now cover all the expenses of management together with the reconstruction of all the great roads under contemplation and as the province will no longer under any circumstances that can be foreseen be a drain upon the finances of the old provinces whilst all these adjacent have experienced a great relief from the advanced position of this provinces and are enjoying a measure of tranquility and a consequent improvement which they never knew before." ⁽³⁾ Evidently, the doubts which were at one time felt as to the expediency of the occupation of Assam, particularly in the eastern half, devastated and impoverished by years of

(1) B.R.C. 12 Sept. 1829, No. 2. See Appendix on the rates of assessment.

(2) See Appendix B.

(3) See C.D. 19 Mar. 1845, No. 12. para 5

misrule and anarchy, were now giving way to satisfaction at the progress which had already been made and confidence in the benefits which would ultimately accrue.

Education - Under the former government education was confined to a limited few. ⁽¹⁾ In the early years of administration the British Government was too much preoccupied with other things to be able to devote much attention to the instruction of the people. Scott obtained the sanction of the Government in Oct. 1826 to assign lands to the support of masters and later he set up on former lines, eleven schools mostly in Lower Assam. ⁽²⁾ A decisive step might have been taken in 1838, when Jenkins pointed out the necessity of employing Assamese youths in the public services and urged the Government to start schools at the Sadr Towns ⁽³⁾ for their education. But the General Committee of public

(1) It was considered not at all necessary by the nobility to read and write which was confined mainly to the Brahmins and the Kakoties (Accountants). Nevertheless, the flickering light of learning was burning even after the period of confusion in the distant 'Toles' (Educational Institutions) where instruction was imparted on the classics, astronomy, arithmetic and medicine by pundits, whose attainments in the opinion of Mr Lidden, translator of Scott and later Professor of Sanskrit, King's College, London, was "respectable". B.P.C. 10 July, 1834, No. 211; White to Jenkins.

(2) B.P.C. 25 Oct. 1826, Nos. 21-22.

(3) B.P.C. 10 July, 1834, No. 211.

instruction, to whose consideration the subject was referred, rejected the proposal as 'beyond their purview.' It merely sanctioned an English school at Gauhati at a monthly expense of Rs. 150.⁽¹⁾

(a) Sadr and Mufassil Schools - When the portals of Government service were opened only to those who were educated, the prejudices of the people, if there were any, were gradually removed. In the first year the enrolment at the Gauhati school was above fifty; it rose to 180 in the third year with an average attendance of 150, while branch schools were set up in the neighbourhood to prepare pupils for entry to the central institution. Early in 1842, another Government school was opened at Sibsager, in Upper Assam.⁽²⁾

highly
That the people were ~~extremely~~ anxious for the education of their children was evinced by the fact, that not only were the branch schools maintained entirely by public subscription but generous contributions were also made ~~to the Government~~ to the Government schools.⁽³⁾ The remoteness of the parganas and the popular prejudice against sending children away from home were however obstacles in the way of educational progress.

(1) B.P.C. 22 June, 1835 Nos. 52-5; Secretary, General Committee of Public Instruction to the Secretary Government of Bengal.

(2) B.E.R. 1836, pp. 32-33; 1838-9, pp. 68-69.

(3) B.E.R. 1838, pp. 68-69. contributions @ Rs. 1000 were made to the Gauhati school by the Raja of Cooch Behar, Dayaram Barua, Chondhury of Dharampur and by Juggo Ram Phuken, a Sadr Amin of Gauhati.

In 1838, to obviate these difficulties Mathie started 20
 (1)
 mufasil schools in the parganas of Kamrup, and similar
 institutions grew up in the following years in the remaining
 districts; their expenses were defrayed partly in money
 and partly by the remission of rent of the lands occupied
 (2)
 by the masters.

(b) Anglo-Vernacular and Vernacular Schools - Instruction
 was imparted in Bengalee on elementary reading, writing and
 arithmetic, while at the Sadr the standard was slightly higher
 with the addition of English, Sanskrit and Persian. Although
 every emphasis was placed at the Government schools on the
 study of English and the number of pupils was higher in that
 department at the beginning, enrolment fell rapidly and dwindled
 to such an extent by 1843, that the Government decided to make
 English optional and to convert the schools at Gauhati and
 Sibsager into vernacular ones. (3)
 In April 1844, the schools
 of Assam - both vernacular and Anglo-vernacular - were brought
 under the direct control of the Government. Mr. W. Robinson,
 who had been serving since 1838 as the Headmaster of the Gauhati
 school, was appointed Inspector of Schools in order to introduce

(1) B.R.C. 14 Aug. 1838, No. 66.

(2) B.E.R. 1843-44, pp. 132-33: The number of vernacular
 schools started at Nowgong was 12, Darrang 5, Lakhimpur 3.
 No school was started at Jorhat till 1843.

(3) B.E.R. 1840-1, pp. 220-22; 1843-4, p. 131.

(1)
a uniform system of education in the province.

In 1845-6, the number of scholars in Assam exceeded 2000 in the books but the average daily attendance was hardly more than 1500. (2) The education which they acquired was of the simplest and most rudimentary kind. The height of their ambition seems to have been simply to read and write, a knowledge which "seldom makes them fit for discharging any higher duties than those of a Gaon Kakoti (village accountant)". It however the spread of education is to be judged from the production of a number of petty officials, the result was far from unsatisfactory. Moffatt Mills, who visited Assam in 1854, was so much harassed (rather besieged as he says) by the number of qualified young applicants from noble families, that he urged the Government to employ only natives of Assam or those domiciled in the province. (3)

We have attempted so far to state fairly and accurately the debit and credit items in the account of the British administration Government. After some vacillation and a bad start, attempts had certainly been made for an allround improvement. Some of the measures might have benefited outsiders or had results not to the expectation of the Government; but most of them during our period were experimental, and it was to be a matter of time before

(1) B.E.R. 1844, Appendix V; Cecil Beadon to the Commissioner of Assam, 29 Apr. 1844.

(2) See Appendix E.

(3) B.E.R. 1845; See Appendix IV; Robinson to Jenkins, Mar. 31, 1845, No. 50.

full benefits could be derived from them. What Napier did in Sind, Lawrence in the Punjab and Bogle in Arakan, within limitations was done with equal earnestness by Scott or Jenkins in Assam. When one takes into consideration the stupendous work and the difficulties confronted - of Geography, communications, ignorance and utter destitution - these achievements were not inconsiderable. It was through their untiring efforts, zeal and benevolence that a beginning was made in education, a settlement was effected in money instead of by pykes, slaves were emancipated, industry and commerce set free, justice was made humane and above all peace and security were promoted everywhere. "We cannot but acknowledge with feelings of gratitude" says a contemporary, "which the Assamese had formed of the happy and beneficial results from the Government of England that have in great measure been fulfilled and the people of Assam have now acquired a degree of confidence in the safety of their lives and property which they had never had the happiness of feeling for ages past." (1) (2) The benefits

(1) Dhekial Phuken, A; Observations on the Administration of the Province of Assam: See Mills, Report on Assam, Appendix J. p. 30.

(2) Even Maniram, the arch enemy of the British Government expressed "As the reward of this pious action in rescuing the people of Assam from the sea of Burmese troubles, may God continue that uninterrupted and undiminished sovereignty till the end of Kalpa (4,320,000,000 years) and make them vigorous and powerful as the Lord of Amaravati (Paradise); Dutta Barua, Maniram; History of Assam (Mss). See Bhuyan, S.K. East India Company's Relations with Assam, 1771-1826, pp. 765-6.

of the Pax Britannica could be appreciated only by those who had suffered or seen the ravages of the Burmese War. The tasks of the transitional period could be seen in their true perspective only by those who are now at the head of the Government.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.

Statement showing the receipts and disbursements in Lower and Upper Assam in the early years of British Administration.(1)

LOWER ASSAM.

	<u>Gross Receipts.</u>	<u>Total Charges</u>	<u>Net Revenue</u>
1824-25 - S.R.	118,723	S.R. 29,538	S.R. 89,184
1825-26 - "	202,060	" 92,513	" 109,547
1826-27 - "	178,686	" 125,016	" 53,671

UPPER ASSAM.

1825-26 - S.R.	28,057	S.R. 27,834	S.R. 223
1826-27 - "	46,072	" 40,731	" 5,241
1827-28 - "	38,836	" 61,695	" 19,428
1828-29 - "	78,453	" 36,166	
1829-30 - "	90,059	" 53,922	" 36,167
1830-31 - "	89,465	" 54,883	" 34,582
1831-32 - "	71,353	Not available	-----
1832-33 - "	106,189	"	-----

(1) B.S.P.C. 23 May, 1828, No. 33; See the statement of the Revenue Account, 5 May, 1828; B.P.C. 10 June, 1831, No. 57; File No. 638.C.O. of 1840, Proceedings regarding the first settlement of Upper Assam.

APPENDIX B.

(2)

Comparative Statements showing the Revenues of Assam.

(I) Increase in the rates of assessments.

	<u>Rupit</u> <u>1833</u>	<u>1853</u>	<u>Bowtalli</u> <u>1833</u>	<u>1853</u>	<u>Faringati</u> <u>1833</u>	<u>1853</u>	<u>Bori</u> <u>1833</u>	<u>1853</u>
Kamrup	1-0	1-4	-12	1-0	0-6	0-8	----	0-9
Darrang	1-8	1-8	-12	0-12	0-4	0-12	----	0-12
Nowgong	1-0	1-4	0-8	0-14	0-8	0-14	----	0-14
Sibsagar & Lakhimpur	Nil	1-4	--	0-12	--	0-12	-----	0-12

(II) Increase in the Net Revenue

	<u>1832-33</u>	<u>1842-43</u>	<u>1852-53</u>
Kamrup	110,181	252,991	295,993
Darrang	41,506	135,453	157,796
Nowgong	31,509	110,314	128,874
Sibsagar } Lakhimpur }	say 50,000	80,843	114,463
	<u>Rs 233,196</u>	<u>34,730</u>	<u>46,563</u>
		<u>Rs. 614,322</u>	<u>Rs. 743,689</u>

(2) Revenue and Judicial Administration of Assam, 1835;
Jenkins; Revenue Administration of Assam, 1853; Mills:
Report on Assam, 1854, pp. 4-5.

APPENDIX C.

(3)

Comparative Statements showing the Exports and Imports of Assam.

(I) EXPORTS: 1809 through Hadira		1854, through Gawalpara	
	<u>Quantity in mds.</u>	<u>Quantity in mds.</u>	<u>Value</u>
Lac	10,000	Rs. 35,000	Rs. 36,750
Muga Silk	65	" 11,350	" 2,622
" Thread	75	" 17,500	" 16,000
Munjit		" 500	" 9,375
Cotton with seed	7,000	" 35,000	175,000
Ivory		" 6,000	" 18,750
Mustard seed	15,000	" 20,000	" 824,000
Long Pepper	50	" 500	" 4,200
Black Pepper	50	" 500	" 1,680
Bell-metal vessels	1,500	" 1,500	" 82,500
Iron Hoes.		" 600	" 1,000
Slaves	100	" 2,000	" 2,500
Thaikol Fruit		" 150	" 120,000
		Rs. 130,900	Rs. 1,197,377

(3) Buchanan, Hamilton, An Account of Assam, pp. 45-6; Mills: Report on Assam. See the report on Gawalpara, pp. 2-3.

APPENDIX C.

(II) IMPORTS.

	<u>Quantity in mds.</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Quantity in mds.</u>	<u>Value</u>
Salt	35,000	Rs.192,500	Rs.370,000
Fine Pulse		" 800	" 150,000
Ghee	1,000	" 1,600	" 20,000
Sugar		" 1,000	" 20,000
Cutlery & Glassware		" 500	" 80,000
Textiles		" 6,500	" 200,000
Spices		" 1,000	" 10,000
Jewels, Pearls, precious Stones, etc.		" 8,000	Iron	" 12,000
Red Lead		" 1,000	Usna rice	" 100,000
Shells		" 100	Mustard Oil	" 32,000
Muslin		" 10,000	Tobacco	" 16,000
			Wheat	" 22,500
			Gur (Molasses)	" 10,000
		<u>Rs. 228,300</u>		<u>Rs.1,022,500</u>

APPENDIX D.

Statement showing the Index of Prices in Assam.⁽⁴⁾

(I) Maximum and minimum rates at Darrang in 1833.

	<u>LAC</u>		<u>MUGA SILK</u>		<u>MUSTARD SEED</u>	
	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.
Prices got by the ryots	3-0	5-8	2-12	3-8	0-8	1-0
" " " " Hawkers	4-6	7-0	3-10	4-9	--	--
Export value -	8-0	10-0	5-0	6-8	1-6	1-14

	<u>SALT</u>	
	Min.	Max.
Purchased by the ryots	10-0	12-0
" " " " Hawkers	6-0	8-0
Import value	3-12	5-8

N.B. Value of Muga Silk is seems; lotherse in maunds.

(II) Barter rates in exchange for Salt and Opium at Darrang in 1838.

A 'seer' of salt @ 4as. a Sr. for 3 Srs. of munjit @ 3-0 a md.

" " " " " " " " " 3 Srs. " wax @ 20-0 "

" " " " " " " " " 15 Srs. " mustard seed @ 1-8 a md.

A 'tola' of Opium @ 3 as a 'tola' for 3 tolas of Muga silk @ 4-0 a Sr

" " " " " " " " " 15 Srs. of mustard seed @ 1-8 a

" " " " " " " " " 15 Srs. of rice @ -8 as a md.

N.B. A seer is equal to two pounds and a 'tola' $\frac{1}{20}$ th of a pound.

(4) B.P.C. 30 May, 1833, No. 82; Hugon to Rutherford; Journal of Upper Assam by Captain Jenkins, 1838, Part I, para 3.

APPENDIX E.

(5)

Statement showing the progress of Education in Assam in 1845.

<u>Anglo-vernacular Schools.</u>	No. of Students	Subjects		Average Attendance
		English	Bengali	
Gauhati	192	33	159	116
Sibsagar	117	30	87	59
<u>Vernacular Schools</u>				
Kamrup	996	-	996	725
Darrang	357	-	357	288
Nowgong	Not	available		
Sibsagar	267	-	267	164
Lakhimpur	269	-	269	154
	<u>2198</u>			<u>1501</u>

(5) B.E.R. 1845-46, Appendix 6.

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